Navigating a normative world: a social psychological exploration of the experiences and identities of trans and/or non-binary adolescents and parents in the UK

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Preface

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University of similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the Biology Degree Committee.

Abstract

Navigating a normative world: a social psychological exploration of the experiences and identities of trans and/or non-binary adolescents and parents in the UK – Susie Bower-Brown

Individuals who are trans and/or non-binary (TNB) – especially those in the life stages of adolescence and parenthood – occupy a marginalised social position and are often the focus of political and public debate. Each of these life stages involves interactions between individuals and institutions: adolescents must attend school daily, and parents must engage with institutions both on the journey to parenthood (e.g. fertility, pregnancy and adoption services) and after becoming a parent (e.g. play groups, nursery and their child(ren)'s school). These experiences are therefore worthy of study from sociological and social psychological perspectives, but such research is limited. This thesis aims to address these gaps by qualitatively exploring the experiences and identities of TNB individuals during adolescence and parenthood. Underpinned by the theoretical framework of structural symbolic interactionism, it is composed of two studies; one that examines the experiences of gender-diverse adolescents (Study 1), and the other that focuses on the experiences of trans and/or non-binary parents (Study 2). The thesis aims to increase understanding of the experiences of adolescents and parents, to explore the way in which inequalities are manifested at individual, interactional and institutional levels for TNB individuals at these two life stages, and to develop recommendations for policy and practice.

Study 1 examines the school experiences and identity processes of gender-diverse adolescents (i.e. adolescents whose gender identity does not correspond with the sex category they were assigned at birth), examining the experiences of binary-trans, non-binary and gender-questioning adolescents separately. The data come from a large survey of LGBTQ + young people's social experiences within the UK. A subsample of 74 adolescents' (25 binary-trans, 25 non-binary, and 24 gender-questioning) open-ended responses were selected for reflexive thematic analysis. The findings demonstrate gender-diverse adolescents experience discrimination at school from a number of sources, and that a range of strategies, including disclosure negotiation, cognitive structuring and proactive protection, are used to navigate this environment. The findings shed light on the school experiences of gender-diverse adolescents, and suggest that the British school system is not fit for purpose with regards to the educational experiences of non-binary and gender-questioning adolescents.

Study 2 explores the experiences of trans and/or non-binary parents in the UK within different parenting spaces, both during and after the transition to parenthood, using an intersectional framework. This study is based upon interviews with 13 TNB parents, and interview data were analysed according to the principles of reflexive thematic analysis. Three main themes were

identified, reflecting participants' experiences within the 'highly normative world' of parenting, and the strategies of 'being a pragmatic parent' and 'being a pioneering parent' used to navigate this. The findings suggest that parenting spaces are not inclusive of TNB identities, and that this is particularly impactful when individuals are being judged on their suitability as parents (e.g. in encounters with fertility clinics and adoption services). The findings of this study increase understanding of the way in which navigation strategies are related to parents' multiple identities, highlighting the usefulness of an intersectional approach for research on this topic. The findings also have a number of practical implications for increasing the inclusivity of parenting spaces.

Taken together, Study 1 and Study 2 make a unique contribution to scholarly understanding of the experiences and identities of TNB individuals within the UK. Theoretically, the thesis points to the usefulness of structural symbolic interactionism as a framework for exploring TNB experiences, and the findings illustrate that extant theoretical frameworks do not adequately attend to the experiences of TNB individuals. There are a number of theoretical, practical and empirical gains from this thesis. Theoretically, several extensions are suggested, for instance, to interactionist theorisations of gender and social psychological conceptualisations of resistance. Practically, implications relate to the need for schools and parenting spaces to assume gender diversity. Empirically, this thesis adds to our understanding of the creative ways in which TNB individuals navigate a normative social world.

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Contents

Glossary

Adolescence	The period between childhood and adulthood, used in this thesis to refer to those aged between 13 and 18
Cisgender (cis)	a term that describes someone whose gender identity corresponds with the sex category they were assigned at birth, i.e. not trans
Cisgenderism	"the ideology that invalidates or pathologises self-designated genders that contrast with external designations" (Ansara & Hegarty, 2012, p. 1)
Cisnormativity	the widespread assumption that all individuals are cisgender, and that being cis is ideal, as seen as institutional and interactional levels
Gender-diverse	an umbrella term used to describe anyone whose gender identity does not correspond with the sex category they were assigned at birth (see also trans and/or non-binary)
Heteronormativity	"the hegemonic system of norms, discourses, and practices that constructs heterosexuality as natural and superior to all other expressions of sexuality" (B. A. Robinson, 2016, p. 1)
Institution	"systems of established and prevalent social rules that structure social interactions" (Hodgson, 2006, p. 2)
Non-binary	an umbrella term that describes individuals who identify as a combination of both genders, a gender outside of the binary, or no gender at all - identities include non-binary, genderfluid, genderqueer, and agender
Oppression	systematic discrimination in the context of unequal power relations, where the welfare of the dominant group is prioritised and promoted, to the detriment of the non-dominant group (Weber, 2010)
Trans(gender)	an umbrella term that describes anyone whose gender identity does not correspond with the sex category they were assigned at birth. For limitations of this term see Definitions, p. 24
Trans and/or non-binary	an umbrella term used to describe anyone whose gender identity does not correspond with the sex category they were assigned as birth (see also gender-diverse)
Transnormativity	a "hegemonic ideology that structures transgender experience, identification, and narratives into a hierarchy of legitimacy that is dependent upon a binary medical model" (Johnson, 2016, p. 466).
Youth	a broader term than adolescence, used to refer to all young people aged 13-25

Acronyms

GRA – Gender Recognition Act 2004

GRC – gender recognition certificate

NTDS – National Transgender Discrimination Survey

SSI – structural symbolic interactionism

SSP – sociological social psychology

TNB – trans and/or non-binary

Chapter 1: Gender diversity in the UK

Gender is arguably one of the key organising features of UK society. Individuals are assigned to a sex category at birth, and this assigned category tends to have life-long implications, from the sports children are allowed to participate in at school, through to the way in which parents are registered on their child(ren)'s birth certificates. Indeed, hegemonic discourse states that all individuals can be categorised into a "two and only two" system of sex and gender (Lucal, 1999, p. 781), where sex category corresponds with gender, and the male-female binary is stable and innate (Westbrook & Schilt, 2014). This thesis takes as its point of departure that this discourse is based on a number of assumptions that may serve to marginalise individuals who do not conform to this gender system (see e.g. Burns, 2018), and that understanding the social experiences of those who identify beyond the cisgender binary is therefore crucial.

The studies of this thesis qualitatively explore the experiences and identity processes of TNB individuals at two trajectories in the life course during which gender may be said to be particularly salient: adolescence and parenthood. In doing so, the thesis adds to the limited literature on the experiences and identities of TNB individuals, and showcases the ways in which normativities are enacted at individual, interactional and institutional levels across the life course. The studies reported herein correspond to two published articles:

Bower-Brown, S., Zadeh, S., & Jadva, V. (2021). Binary-trans, non-binary and gender-questioning adolescents' experiences in UK schools. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, *0*(0), 1–19. doi:10.1080/19361653.2021.1873215.

Bower-Brown, S., & Zadeh, S. (2021). "I guess the trans identity goes with other minority identities": An intersectional exploration of the experiences of trans and non-binary parents living in the UK. *International Journal of Transgender Health*, *22*(1–2), 101–112. doi:10.1080/26895269.2020.1835598.[1]

The thesis consists of four chapters: Chapter 1 provides an introduction to gender diversity within the UK today and outlines the thesis' positioning and aims. Chapter 2 is based on a study of the school experiences and identity processes of binary-trans, non-binary and gender-questioning adolescents. Chapter 3 reports a study of the experiences and identities of trans

[1] This thesis offers the space for an extended discussion of the findings of each of these studies as published. In particular, the theoretical and policy implications are expanded upon, further aspects of the data explored, and findings further discussed in relation to the literature.

and/or non-binary parents within parenting spaces. Chapter 4 reviews the thesis' main findings and draws conclusions from the two studies, focussing on what is gained from studying these groups together.

This introductory chapter will first outline the normativities that characterise dominant discourses about TNB people in the UK, followed by a discussion of the way in which these normativities relate to the life stages of adolescence and parenthood. Subsequently, the aims and positioning of the thesis will be made clear and the definitions used within the thesis discussed.

Normativities within the UK

One way to understand the way in which TNB identities are represented and regarded within the UK is to explore the normativities that exist within society. Normative, here, refers to "notions conceived as broadly common or standard across a population and framed as prescriptive or ideal" (Hammack et al., 2019, p. 2). In other words, normativities refer to what is thought to be both common and valid within society. Of particular relevance to the thesis are cisnormativity, heteronormativity, and transnormativity, and these will be discussed insofar as they relate to existing legislation, and political and public discourse about TNB people.

Cisnormativity

TNB individuals have always existed (Burns, 2018; Susan Stryker, 2008b), but trans issues have only recently been given substantive governmental attention in the UK.[2] In 2016, the first governmental inquiry into trans equality was held, finding that "across the board, government departments are struggling to support trans people effectively" (Women and Equalities Committee, 2016, p. 4), and that TNB people face transphobia and erasure within the NHS, legal system and criminal justice system. UK legal, medical and social services can therefore be described as cisnormative. This is also reflected in the lack of data on how many TNB people there are – the Census does not collect data on gender identity, for example (Office for National Statistics, 2016), and the Government Equalities Office's Report succinctly responded to the question 'How many trans people are there?' with "We don't know." (Government Equalities Office, 2018). Estimates vary substantially – the Government Equalities Office (2018) estimate that there are around 200,000-500,000 trans people in the UK, whereas Stonewall (2017) estimate there to be around 1 million. Notably, the 2021 Census will, for the first time, include

[2] Relatedly, LGBTQ+ organisations only recently started becoming involved in campaigning for trans issues; for instance, Stonewall, the UK's leading LGBTQ+ charity, started including trans issues in 2015 (Hunt & Manji, 2015).

separate questions on sex and gender (Office for National Statistics, 2020). Until this data is published there are no reliable estimates of the UK TNB population.

Alongside being cisnormative, it can also be suggested that the UK environment is cisgenderist, meaning that dominant discourse not only assumes that everyone is cisgender but also implies that non-cis identities are not valid. One example of how these assumptions proliferate is through the mass media, which has been found to both sensationalise and pathologise TNB identities. Burns (2018) noted that it was not until 2010 that the first British national newspaper featured a series about trans issues written by a trans person. Moreover, media outlets (on both sides of the political spectrum) regularly publish articles by gender-critical feminists, who argue that giving rights to trans women will erase single-sex spaces specifically, and the rights of cis women in general (Pearce et al., 2020). Such discourse is arguably reflective of what Westbrook and Schilt (2014) have referred to as 'gender panics' within women-only spaces, whereby trans women are thought to be threatening to cis women, a notion that has been deemed both cisgenderist, in implying that trans women are actually men, and misogynistic, in implying that women are weak and in need of protection (Pearce et al., 2020; Westbrook & Schilt, 2014). It has also been noted that there is an assumed whiteness of the cis women who are in need of protection (Pearce et al., 2020).[3] The impact of such media should not be underestimated: one survey found that 78% of 293 trans respondents felt angry when seeing negative media items about trans people, and 41% felt frightened (Liu & On Road Media, 2017). Trans adults report that media representations of trans people are both beneficial (insofar as they increase public understanding and awareness) and detrimental (insofar as representations are stereotypical and narrow) (Mocarski et al., 2019). A US study found that exposure to negative media messages about trans people was associated with poorer mental health outcomes in trans adults (Hughto et al., 2021), thus further identifying a relationship between media representations and psychological wellbeing.[4]

Cisheteronormativity

Alongside existing assumptions – embedded within social structures – that everyone is cis, there is also a societal assumption that men will be attracted to women, and vice versa, known as heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is the "hegemonic system of norms, discourses, and practices that constructs heterosexuality as natural and superior to all other expressions of sexuality" (B. A. Robinson, 2016, p. 1). A number of examples of heteronormativity within

[3] This should be understood within the historical context of sex-segregated spaces being initially created in order to protect white femininities specifically (Patel, 2017).

[4] This is consistent with a minority stress perspective (I. H. Meyer, 2003), and also consistent with previous research that has found an association between negative campaign messages around the same-sex marriage vote, and the well-being of same-sex couples in the US (Frost & Fingerhut, 2016).

dominant discourse can be identified; heteronormativity is evident within the media, for instance, in the portrayal of heterosexual intimacies as normal and ideal (Barker & Gill, 2018). Within legislation it is also evident, such as in the legal impossibility for there to be two mothers on a child's birth certificate, thus potentially discriminating against same-gender female couples (S. Green, 2019).[5] The concepts of cisnormativity and heteronormativity are inextricably linked – they reinforce each other through the notion of compulsory heterosexuality between cis people as the only 'natural' option in romantic relationships (Renold, 2006; Rich, 1980; Schilt & Westbrook, 2009).[6] Cisheteronormativity therefore relies upon the assumption of the naturalness of an unchanged, binary gender and resultant heterosexuality, with people who differ from these norms being subject to discrimination in contexts where these norms flourish. Cisheteronormativity has been shown to be pervasive in UK hegemonic ideals of 'the family' as consisting of a mother/father unit and their biologically related children (Tasker et al., 2018), thus serving to discriminate against families that do not conform to these norms.

Transnormativity

Dominant discourses, in which UK legislation and policy are embedded, have also been said to be transnormative in nature. Transnormativity is the assumption that all non-cis identities are binary-trans identities, and involve a medical transition. This constructs a hierarchy in which identities that do not conform to these standards are potentially considered less 'real' than binary-trans identities or 'not trans enough' (Johnson, 2016). The Gender Recognition Act 2004 has been criticised by TNB people for being intrusive and pathologising insofar as obtaining a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC) requires a diagnosis of gender dysphoria (Bachmann & Gooch, 2018). Other requirements include that the person must have lived in their 'acquired gender' for the previous two years, and must intend to live in that gender until death (White, 2018). The GRA therefore not only prohibits gender fluidity, but also offers no legal recognition of non-binary identities. The Equality Act 2010 introduced "gender reassignment" as a protected characteristic, thus legally protecting "transsexual persons" from discrimination (Equality Act 2010). This legal recognition has been used in court to protect trans people – one case, for instance, held that it was "incompatible with human dignity" for an employee to refuse to refer to trans people using their pronouns (*Mackereth v The Department for Work and Pensions and Advanced Personnel Management Group*, 2019, p. 32). However, in specifying that the law applied to 'transsexual persons', whether or not non-binary and fluid identities are also protected under this act has until very recently been somewhat of a legal grey area. Only in

[5] Whilst it is possible for the second partner in a same-gender female couple to be registered as a legal parent, it is not possible for them to be registered as a mother.

[6] It should also be noted that gender and sexuality are often linked, as many sexual orientations imply knowledge of one's own gender (Vidal-Ortiz, 2001). However, emerging sexuality labels, such as pansexual, tend to be less gender-dependent (Watson et al., 2019).

2020, 10 years after the original Act was introduced, did an employment tribunal rule that the Equality Act does in fact apply to non-binary and fluid identities (*Taylor v Jaguar Land Rover Ltd*, 2020).[7]

Current UK legislation, and in particular the GRA, has thus been deemed inappropriate for a large proportion of the TNB population; indeed it has been suggested that legal gender recognition, and the benefits it affords, are primarily available to white, (upper) middle-class, able-bodied, binary-trans people (Lowik, 2018). A recent consultation was held about the GRA, and despite a high proportion of survey respondents wanting extensive reform of the Act[8], minimal changes were made in effect (Government Equalities Office, 2020).

Normativities in the lives of TNB children and adolescents

The GRA does not currently offer legal recognition of gender-diverse[9] individuals under the age of 18, despite gender-diverse youth rising in numbers (GIDS, 2020) and utilising increasingly varied terms to describe their gender (Watson et al., 2019). Moreover, despite the fact that the governmental inquiry into trans equality concluded that "delaying treatment for young people risks more harm than providing it" (Women and Equalities Committee, 2016, p. 3), a recent High Court ruling stated that children under 16 could not reasonably give informed consent to medical treatment involving puberty blockers (Bowcott, 2020). This judgement will likely have significant implications for gender-diverse youth who wish to access such medical care (Pearce et al., 2020), and ultimately demonstrates that the autonomy of TNB children and adolescents is not supported by UK law.

TNB children and adolescents are often also problematically represented within the media, signalling the fact that dominant discourse, and the normativities underlying it, are especially relevant to TNB youth. One study with trans adults, for example, found that representations of children were thought to be particularly problematic, in that they misgendered children and presented them as too young to properly understand themselves (Humphrey, 2016). Research conducted by the NGO Mermaids, which supports gender-diverse children, found that mentions of trans children in British newspapers were 23 times more common in 2018/19 compared to 2012 (Baker, 2019), suggesting a recent proliferation of media coverage of TNB youth. It has also been suggested that offline medias in particular may rely on transphobic representations (McInroy & Craig, 2015), while online medias may be more authentic and thus a source of

[7] Relatedly, this lack of support for non-binary identities can also be seen in public attitudes – a recent survey of 2573 UK adults found that 48% of respondents believed that passports should not have an 'X category'. Twenty-four percent said they should, and 28% said they did not know (YouGov, 2019).

[8] For instance, 79% of over 100,000 respondents supported the removal of the requirement for individuals to prove having lived as their 'acquired gender' for a period of time (Stonewall, 2020).

[9] Gender-diverse is used interchangeably with TNB within this chapter. See Definitions (p.24) for a discussion of the rationale for all terms used.

support to trans adolescents (Selkie et al., 2020). Such insights are especially noteworthy given that offline media is often used as a form of education by those unfamiliar on trans issues (McInroy & Craig, 2015).

Normativities in the lives of TNB parents

Legislation and policy relating to TNB parents in the UK has also been conceptualised as cisnormative and cisgenderist in nature. While it has been suggested that between one-quarter and one-half of trans adults are parents (Stotzer et al., 2014), in a number of different countries across the world, legal gender recognition has historically been coupled with the requirement of sterilisation (Dunne, 2017) and in countries such as Finland, compulsory sterilisation remains in force today (Honkasalo, 2018). Although the UK does not have a history of compulsory sterilisation, scholars including Toze (2018) have highlighted that hysterectomies have been consistently recommended for the majority of trans masculine people (despite limited medical evidence supporting their efficacy), in effect discouraging trans pregnancy as a means to parenthood.[10]

At present, it is not possible for parents in the UK to choose how they wish to be identified on their children's birth certificates (White, 2018). As there is no legal recognition of non-binary identities, there is also none of non-binary parents. In response to a number of legal challenges, a recent High Court ruling stated that if someone gives birth, they are legally the child's mother (regardless of their gender identity); it also stated that there was a "material difference between a person's gender and their status as a parent" (Batchelor, 2020). Such legislation is an example of cisgenderism in action, insofar as it does not give individuals the ability to make choices about how to identify in terms of both their gender identity and their identity as a parent. Legislation should be understood alongside the representation of trans parenting within the UK media, with the multiple 'first pregnant men' within UK media evidencing a sensationalising of trans parents that has been said to contribute to their erasure in the public domain (Pearce & White, 2019; Toze, 2018). Indeed, media representations of trans men who give birth have relied on the "trope of novelty" (Pearce & White, 2019, p. 764) that positions them as neither 'normal' nor 'real men' (Riggs, 2014). It has therefore been suggested that TNB families are

[10] Interestingly, the media focus on male pregnancy can be contrasted with the focus on trans women in women-only spaces. Both discourses can be seen as protecting cis women from perceived harm or loss of rights. As motherhood has typically been equated with womanhood (Russo, 1976) and pregnancy has been perceived as an exclusively female activity, trans men have been represented as being threatening to women, due to being able to also become pregnant. However, in terms of women-only spaces, trans men are not seen as threatening (either to men/women only spaces), rather it is trans women who are portrayed as threatening. This represents the ways in which trans rights are often positioned as being opposed to cis women's rights.

paradoxically both invisible and hypervisible (Pfeffer, 2012): the sensationalising of stories relies on the erasure of prior stories.

Reifying normativities: The history of trans research

Research paradigms often reflect not only the normative society in which they are generated, but also serve to strengthen and justify existing normativities (Hammack et al., 2019; Mohr, 2009). This has certainly been the case within research on TNB people, much of which has arguably been implicated in reifying cisnormativity and transphobia (Vincent, 2018). For instance, research into the origins of TNB identities has been both pervasive and stigmatising, with the underlying assumption that by knowing why some people 'become' TNB, it will be possible to stop this happening (Turban, 2020).

Historically (and to a lesser extent contemporarily), trans research has been conducted in a medical setting by cis researchers. A recent map of the field of research on trans issues highlighted that from 2010-2014 the most commonly researched topic was surgery/therapeutics: 224 articles had been written on surgery/therapeutics, compared to 70 on social support, relationships and families (Marshall et al., 2019). Such findings demonstrate a medicalised focus on trans lives, and has been criticised as being pathologising (Vincent, 2018).[11] Similarly, Ansara and Hegarty's (2012) study of psychological research on gender-diverse children found that pathologising and misgendering language had remained stable in scholarship over time (from 1999 to 2008). Notably, cisgenderist language was more common in mental health research, and research that had used such language received a higher number of citations, suggesting higher overall impact.

At the same time, research on TNB parents has more recently been subject to critique in its relationship to dominant discourse. A book written by two prominent sexologists in the 1960s suggested that young children should be told "that daddy will be living far away and probably unable to see them" (R. Green & Money, 1969; for criticisms see Pyne, 2012). While such recommendations would likely not be made by academic researchers today, a number of studies have nevertheless used language that arguably serves to 'other' TNB parents. For instance, one observational of children with TNB parents reported that "these children look like ordinary little boys and girls, not young androgynes or transgenders" (Chiland et al., 2013, p. 368), as though the latter are second rate to 'ordinary' cisgender children. Considering that over 90% of trans people surveyed in the UK have heard others say that trans people are not normal

[11] It has been suggested that the medicalisation of TNB identities is often necessary for TNB individuals to receive funding for gender-affirming treatments; in the US, for instance, it is necessary to have a diagnosis to be covered by health insurance. It is therefore important to note that "trans is not a disorder but should still receive funding" (Richards et al., 2015, p. 309).

(McNeil et al., 2013), there is an urgent need for rigorous, empirical research that does not further pathologise TNB identities, but rather seeks to understand TNB experiences in contexts.

This thesis

From the landscapes of UK society and academic research detailed above, research on the experiences of UK TNB individuals, and particularly adolescents and parents, is clearly warranted. Firstly, gender-diverse adolescents and parents are unsupported in law and policy, but often discussed within the media: in other words, they occupy a marginalised position within the public sphere. Adolescence and parenthood also represent points in the life course at which individuals 'meet' unsupportive institutional contexts (e.g. schools and medical services), a situation over which they generally have little choice: adolescents must attend school, and adults are often required to engage with institutions on the journey to parenthood, including pregnancy/fertility care, adoption services, and, once having become parents, nursery, play groups and their children's schools.[12] Finally, given the problematic history of research on trans populations, it is crucial that research aims to challenge normativities, rather than being implicated in upholding them.

Theoretical positioning

This thesis is broadly situated in the discipline of social psychology, but also makes references to a number of sociological theories, acknowledging that much can be gained from considering the empirical and theoretical insights of these disciplines together (Schooler, 2003). Whilst sociology and social psychology are traditionally thought of as two distinct academic disciplines, this thesis is situated within the field of sociological social psychology (SSP), a branch of social psychology that aims to understand the way in which "social structures impact persons and interaction and the reciprocal impact of persons and interaction on social structures" (Sheldon Stryker, 2006, p. 212).[13] One of the three major perspectives within SSP is that of symbolic interactionism (Rohall, 2015; Sheldon Stryker, 2006). Structural symbolic interactionism is used throughout the thesis to make sense of the way in which normativities and social structures impact upon the experiences of TNB individuals at individual, interactional and institutional

[12] In fact, both groups may be said to be on trajectories of identity development, from childhood to young adulthood and from non-parenthood to parenthood (see p. 26). It has previously been suggested that identity is a process in adolescence that "either regenerates or resists the social order" (Hammack & Toolis, 2015, p. 13). The same may be said of becoming a parent, in that it involves the transmission of meanings and ideas from one generation to the next. Interestingly, previous research has employed life course theory (Elder, 1998; Elder et al., 2003), which considers individual experiences within their sociohistorical context, to explore TNB individuals' thoughts about future parenthood (Tasker & Gato, 2020).

[13] A distinction is often made between sociological and psychological social psychology, where psychological social psychology is more concerned with psychological processes at an intrapersonal level (House & Mortimer, 1990).

levels. Other theories, from both sociology and social psychology respectively, are drawn upon where relevant.[14] The thesis is also qualitative in nature, reflecting the fact that qualitative research is particularly well placed to explore the ways in which individuals may experience inequalities (Gabb & Allen, 2020; Marecek et al., 1997).

Although there are a number of different schools of symbolic interactionism (M. J. Carter & Fuller, 2015), the main propositions, as described by Blumer (1969), are that (1) individuals act towards 'things' based on the meanings that such 'things' hold for them; (2) these meanings arise from social interaction; (3) these meanings are managed and modified through an interpretative process, by which an individual's meanings change as they encounter different 'things' (Blumer, 1969). Therefore, an individual's meaning-making arises from interaction with others, is modified through their interpretation, and impacts upon their behaviour. Importantly, when referring to 'things' Blumer is referring not only to physical objects, but also social objects (e.g. parent) and abstract objects (e.g. fairness). For instance, an individual's understanding of what it means to be a parent will depend on their social interactions, and this meaning will impact upon their behaviour towards different parents and their behaviour as a parent. Additionally, this meaning will evolve depending on their experiences. This theorisation is clearly useful when exploring the way in which understandings of parenthood are related to the cisheteronormative environment (Tasker et al., 2018), in that it enables an understanding of the ways in which social behaviour towards (and of) parents depends on such meaning-making processes.

In terms of symbolic interactionist theorisations of society, Blumer (1969) suggested that human society is based upon action, and that institutions exist only insofar as people are acting. However, Stryker (2008) has noted that although society is based on meanings, actions and interactions, these patterns of interactions are relatively stable, and exist prior to individuals joining society. Therefore, he proposed the revised model of *structural* symbolic interactionism (SSI).

Structural symbolic interactionism is a theoretical framework that views the self, and its development, as inherently social (Blumer, 1962; Mead, 1934). Structural symbolic interactionism, and symbolic interactionism more generally, can be traced back to the work of George Herbert Mead, who suggested that the self is characterised by being "both subject and object" (Mead, 1934, p. 137), meaning that individuals come to experience themselves through the eyes of others. Mead emphasised that these others include not only other specific

[14] While these theories align with the thesis' theoretical positioning within the field of sociological social psychology, for intellectual transparency and clarity, their disciplinary orientations (i.e. as either 'from' sociology or 'from' social psychology) are signposted throughout.

individuals, but also the 'generalised social other', meaning the responses of the social group as a whole. According to his theorisation, self-consciousness, and therefore the 'self' itself, arises as a result of taking the role of the generalised other. Mead's insights on the generalised other can be strengthened through reflecting on Du Bois' (1903) notion of 'double consciousness', where individuals of marginalised social statuses develop an understanding of their identity both through their own eyes *and* through the eyes of the generalised other (see also Chapter 2). Through this framework, the self is ultimately considered to be reflexive and formed through interaction.

SSI, specifically, is based on the premise that human experience *is* socially organised – the self develops within a pre-existing society, meaning the probability of an individual having certain experiences depends upon their background and resources (Sheldon Stryker, 2006). The approach can be summed up as "society shapes self, shapes social interaction" (Sheldon Stryker, 2008, p. 19), thus offering a clear theorisation of how identities are ongoing processes, formed in relation to social structure.[15] Stryker has additionally posited that human beings are actors, such that an individual's self-defined meanings influence and are influenced by society, thus pointing to the possibility for interactional change to enact institutional change.

In short, SSI theorises the way in which existing normativities and social structures are linked to social interaction and the self (Layder & Stryker, 1982; Sheldon Stryker, 2008). Importantly, Stryker highlighted that the process of structural interactionism is:

> A process by which large-scale structures such as class, age, gender, and ethnicity operate through more intermediate structures such as neighbourhoods, schools, and associational memberships to affect relationships in social networks (Sheldon Stryker, 2008, p. 20).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, symbolic interactionist approaches have been used extensively to explore the doing of gender at an interactional level (Kessler & McKenna, 1978; West & Zimmerman, 1987, see also Chapter 2) and the experiences of TNB individuals specifically (e.g. Darwin, 2017; De Vries, 2012; Sumerau et al., 2020). However, researchers in this area have less often used structural approaches specifically. Given the way in which normativities evidently impact the lives of TNB individuals, this thesis explores what can be gleaned from taking an explicitly structural approach. In so doing, it employs theory in the service of empirical data at the same time as it employs empirical data in the service of theory.

[15] Given the use of SSI as the underlying theoretical framework, this thesis takes the view that identity is an ongoing process, rather than a static product, and thus the term 'identity process(es)' is used throughout the thesis.

Normativities and structural stigma

SSI therefore theorises the way in which societal normativities are linked to social interaction and the self and, as suggested within SSI, an individual's sense of identity depends on the social environment in which they live and the social interactions that they have. Also useful for further explicating this process are stigma theories, which focus more specifically on the experiences of those who are socially excluded by societal normativities. The theories that will be discussed here are structural stigma theory, labelling theory and minority stress theory. Structural stigma theory focuses on the way in which stigma is enacted at an institutional level. As defined by Hatzenbuehler (2016, p. 1), structural stigma refers to "societal-level conditions, cultural norms, and institutional policies that constrain the opportunities, resources and wellbeing of the stigmatised". Structural stigma has been evidenced to negatively impact the mental and behavioural health or LGB youth (Hatzenbuehler, 2017). Although structural stigma has been less explored within the lives of TNB individuals (Bränström & Pachankis, 2021), it has been noted that structural stigma impacts the lives of TNB people in multiple ways, from the medicalisation of non-cis identities to restricted access to healthcare (Hughto et al., 2015). A recent study of structural stigma within 28 EU countries found that structural stigma, at a country level, was associated with lower life satisfaction in transgender adults (Bränström & Pachankis, 2021). Notably, this association was mostly due to higher levels of identity concealment in countries with higher levels of structural stigma, suggesting the importance of looking at stigma at multiple levels (see minority stress theory below).

Labelling theory more specifically focusses on the way in which society's messages about certain phenomena influence the way in which stigmatised (or 'labelled') people perceive themselves and approach the social environment (Link, 1987). Link and Phelan (2001) note that stigma depends on a number of components: people label differences, hegemonic cultural beliefs link labelled people to negative stereotypes, and labelled people are placed within distinct categories. Consequently, those who are labelled experience discrimination and this leads to unequal outcomes. As the sociocultural environment in the UK can be seen as cisnormative, it is clear that TNB individuals may be labelled as 'other' and be discriminated against accordingly.

Stigma has also been further theorised within minority stress theory, which explicates the link between stigma within the environment and mental health outcomes. In particular, minority stress theory focusses on interpersonal stigma, and distinguishes between distal and proximal stressors, where distal stressors refer to prejudice events (including discrimination and violence) and proximal stressors refer to internal processes (including expectations of rejection, concealment and internalised stigma) (I. H. Meyer, 2003). Importantly, these two types of

stressors are interrelated: normativities that underpin the structural, social and interpersonal stressors that impact upon TNB populations are also related to intrapersonal stressors.[16]

In other words, the policies and normativities that have been outlined above clearly impact upon the lives of TNB individuals. SSI and stigma theories make clear the importance of focussing on the lived experiences of TNB individuals, in order to understand precisely *how* stigma and normativities at institutional, structural, social and interpersonal levels are enacted within TNB lives.

Critical realism

This thesis also adopts the perspective of critical realism. Critical realism can be thought of as at the midpoint of a continuum between realism (which posits that there is a one extrinsic reality) and relativism (which posits that there is no reality beyond the subjective realities of each individual) (see e.g. Willig, 2016). Indeed, Willig (2016) has suggested that much qualitative research is based on both ontological realism and epistemological relativism: ontological realism posits the existence of a reality that is independent of the way in which we construct it, and epistemological relativism means that our understandings of the world are socially constructed, and based on our own positioning (Maxwell, 2011; Zadeh, 2017). In other words, scholars adopting a critical realist approach broadly conceive that there is a 'real' world, but that meanings made about the world are determined by our own experiences and identities, and serve to influence the ways in which we interact within it.

Such an approach is therefore highly compatible with SSI, as each recognise the way in which the meanings that an individual holds influence their behaviour, and that existing social structures simultaneously constrain individual rights and opportunities. In this way, SSI and critical realism can be used in tandem to explore the way in which individuals' subjective experiences are related to time and place, and specifically, how structural inequalities manifest at an interactional level. Taking a specifically critical realist approach to the study of TNB experiences allows not only for recognition of the fact that normativities are experienced as real by individuals, but also recognition of their socially constructed nature.

Social justice

It has been suggested that the "social psychology of the twenty-first century must reaffirm its role as a form of scientific activism working against injustice" (Hammack, 2018, p. 3). Although it has been noted that social psychology as a discipline was in part created with social justice aims in mind, contemporary social psychology is often disengaged from settings of injustice,

[16] Minority stress theory has been used extensively with TNB populations (e.g. Bockting et al., 2013; Breslow et al., 2015; C. Scandurra et al., 2019) and experiences of discrimination are consistently found to be related to mental health outcomes.

with researchers studying variables in experiments rather than people in their environments (Hammack, 2018; Reicher, 2011). It is crucial that research in general – and research on TNB populations in particular – aims to understand the experiences of individuals within their sociohistorical contexts. Where relevant, such research should also seek to challenge social contexts that contribute to the marginalisation of particular populations.[17]

In terms of how to conduct social justice research, Hammack (2018) suggests four key principles. The first principle is 'critical ontologies', meaning that research should take a critical approach to understanding experience, situating individuals within their sociohistorical contexts and understanding how this relates to societal power. The second principle is 'assumption of a normative stance', which suggests that research should avoid positioning itself as 'objective' but rather should acknowledge its commitment to social justice. The third principle, 'alliance with the subordinate', suggests that research should aim to achieve outcomes which benefit the marginalised group under study. Finally, the fourth principle of 'analysis of resistance' notes that it is important to not only understand marginalised groups as 'victims' of oppression, but also understand the way in which individuals resist such oppression. These four principles were considered in all aspects of the research process, from data collection, to analysis, to writing up. The ways in which the thesis' social justice aims were achieved is further outlined in the following chapters.

Positionality

When undertaking qualitative research, it is important to outline the researcher's positionality, as it is recognised that the researcher's life experience, identity and theoretical stance influence all aspects of the research process (Edwards & Mauthner, 2012). The ways in which positionality relates to the specific studies of each chapter is explored in further depth in Chapters 2 and 3 – as the studies used different methodologies, and involved different participant groups, it is important that they are considered separately. However, the thesis should be regarded in light of the researcher's identities and theoretical background at the outset.

Much reflection within qualitative research has focussed on the insider/outsider status of the researcher. It has been suggested that insiders may be more able to describe the lived experiences of a community and produce research that benefits the community, but that their familiarity with a topic may mean that they rely too heavily on assumptions of shared understanding in their investigations (Hayfield & Huxley, 2014; Rosenberg & Tilley, 2020). In

[17] Relatedly, there is increasingly a move towards research on this topic being conducted by trans people, thus positioning trans people as active subjects in, rather than objects of, research (Riggs, 2014; Rosenberg & Tilley, 2020).

contrast, it has been suggested that outsiders may be advantaged, in that participants may assume less commonality with them, and therefore explain their experiences in greater depth (Hayfield & Huxley, 2014), but it is also acknowledged that outsiders may rely on misguided stereotypes or assumptions, particularly if research is conducted without an understanding of the history or terminology of the community under study (Rosenberg & Tilley, 2020; Vincent, 2018). Throughout most of my doctoral research, I have identified as a queer, cisgender woman,[18] and therefore I may be described as an insider to the LGBTQ+ community, but an outsider to the TNB community specifically. In this way, I am both an insider *and* outsider (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Indeed, the simple dichotomy of insider/outsider fails to make sense when considering multiple aspects of identity, and the way in which identities intersect (Hayfield & Huxley, 2014; Nelson, 2020; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2013). For instance, I am middle-class, white British and able-bodied, and recognise that these identities are privileges that may have limited my understanding of participants' experiences of classism, racism and ableism. However, multiple aspects of these identities were shared with some participants, thus pointing to the complicated nature of considering the impact of intersecting identities in academic research (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2013). Nevertheless, it has been suggested that the insider/outsider status of the researcher may be particularly important in the context of individual interviews, as interviews are an interactional space between interviewer and interviewee (Farr, 1982; Zadeh, 2017). These insights are further explored in Chapter 3 of the thesis.

It has also been acknowledged that it is important for researchers to explore their motivations for conducting research, particularly on marginalised communities about whom historical research motivations include voyeurism (K. Snow, 2018; Vincent, 2018). I first became involved in a research project on TNB parent families led by Professor Susan Golombok when I was doing my undergraduate psychology degree. As both a queer person and someone with an interest in family/social psychology, I became interested in the research at the University of Cambridge Centre for Family Research on the experiences of LGBTQ+ families. In particular, I began to understand the way in which research on same-sex parent families has influenced policy, such as the role of research in facilitating the removal in UK law of the need for a father to be considered in clinicians' decisions about assisted reproduction treatment provision (see e.g. Golombok, 2020). In light of the lack of research on TNB parent families, I felt motivated to conduct research with TNB parents and, considering the lack of sensitive research on TNB individuals in general, I wanted this research to be as ethical, sensitive and respectful as

[18] My identification with the category of cis woman has changed over time, such that I am currently questioning whether this category does describe my experience of gender (See Chapter 3 for a further discussion on this point).

possible. Guidelines that are specific to trans research were followed (Galupo, 2017; Vincent, 2018), and the practical steps taken to ensure that the research I undertook was ethical throughout are discussed in Chapters 2 and 3.

Definitions

Within research on TNB individuals, is important to reflect critically on the definitions used among researchers in the field, as "in the vibrant world of transgender studies, a year rarely goes by without the emergence of new vocabulary" (J. Green et al., 2018, p. 100). While the key terms used within the thesis are defined in the glossary above, it is nevertheless important to discuss the discursive tensions within the field, and to outline the rationale for using certain terms herein.

Whilst trans has typically been used as an umbrella term within the literature, it has been noted that this may be an "overstretched" umbrella (Hines, 2010, p. 600), in that some individuals (to whom it is said that the label of trans 'should' be socially applied) would not use the term to refer to themselves (Valentine, 2004). For instance, not all individuals who are non-binary see themselves as being trans (see Darwin, 2020, for a detailed discussion), yet the use of such umbrella terminology is extensive.[19] Additionally, despite non-binary identities becoming more visible, it has been noted that the literature within trans studies has tended to focus on the narratives of binary-trans individuals to the exclusion of non-binary identities (Darwin, 2017). Indeed, there has been a lack of research exploring diversity *under* the trans umbrella. In recognition of this, it is becoming more common for academic studies to explicitly include and recognise non-binary people as participants in research; for instance, recent articles have used umbrella terms such as 'trans and non-binary' (C. Brown & Rogers, 2020; Kattari et al., 2020; Tasker & Gato, 2020), 'trans and gender-diverse' (Davy & Cordoba, 2019; Gower et al., 2018) and 'transgender and gender-nonconforming' (Chen et al., 2019).

For the purposes of this thesis, some key terms have been decided upon after extensive reflection. Given the issues described above with using 'trans' as an umbrella term[20], alternative terms have been selected. The first umbrella term used within the thesis is 'gender-diverse', used in Chapter 2 to describe the overall sample of binary-trans, non-binary and gender-questioning adolescents. Gender-diverse was chosen in accordance with its use by support

[19] For instance, Gendered intelligence, a UK charitable organisation which aims to support TNB people, state that "not all non-binary people identify as trans but at Gendered Intelligence when we say 'trans' we aim to include non-binary people" (Gendered Intelligence, 2019). This example is used not as a criticism of the organisation but rather to demonstrate the complexity of using somewhat 'leaky' umbrella terms.

[20] In particular, 25% of the non-binary participants within Study 1 of this thesis explicitly responded 'no' to the question 'are you trans?'.

organisations such as Mermaid and Gendered Intelligence, and is deliberately broad, being inclusive of non-binary and gender-questioning identities. The second umbrella term used within the thesis is 'trans and/or non-binary'. The 'and/or' aims to reflect the fact that some non-binary individuals identify as trans, and some do not. This term is used in Chapter 3 to describe the overall sample of trans and/or non-binary parents. While these two different umbrella terms reflect the specificities of each sample[21] and so are used in Chapters 2 and 3 respectively, they are used interchangeably in Chapters 1 and 4. LGBTQ+ is also used as an umbrella term, as opposed to LGBT or LGBTQ, with the above stated aim of being as inclusive as possible in mind. Where other scholars have used alternative terms, these have generally been retained throughout, so as to both demonstrate the many different terminologies in use, and in acknowledgement of the fact that different terminologies may reflect the samples specific to individual research studies.

While the terms detailed above have been determined the most appropriate for participants in the studies that comprise the thesis, it is recognised that they may nevertheless be exclusionary, and will undoubtedly become outdated and replaced with newer terminology in the future. It does not mean to suggest that such categories are stable, or that they are even used by participants themselves – it is possible that participants would not themselves self-identify as part of the social category to which they have been assigned (Zadeh, 2017). For instance, it is possible that adolescents may dislike the umbrella term of gender-diverse, instead preferring trans, another term, or no term at all. On this point, it is worth noting that the thesis takes a critical approach to categories, viewing them as historically and socially situated (Gillespie et al., 2012). The thesis aims to use categories as conceptual tools with which to explore the social world, rather than as a means of reifying them as boundaries that limit individuals' identity development and expression, something that will be explored further in subsequent chapters.

Aim of the thesis

It is clear that gender-diverse individuals are highly marginalised within society; moreover, it is clear that gender-diverse adolescents and TNB parents face particular marginalisation within both public policy and discourse. Despite the clear need for research on these two groups, their experiences remain relatively unexplored. The thesis, therefore, aims to address these gaps within the research, situating the experiences of TNB individuals within their sociohistorical context

The thesis focusses on these two groups for a number of reasons. Firstly, both adolescence and parenthood represent trajectories of fundamental identity change, from child to young adult,

[21] Gender-diverse is inclusive of gender-questioning individuals, and gender-questioning adolescents were included in Study 1, whereas Study 2 did not specifically include gender-questioning parents.

and non-parent to parent, respectively. Adolescence is a crucial stage for identity development (Erikson, 1994), as adolescents tend to desire more autonomy from parents (Smetana & Rote, 2019) and increase their engagement with peers (Erikson, 1994; Smetana et al., 2006). The transition to parenthood is also a time of substantial change, as an individual's sense of self adjusts to incorporate their new status as a parent (Cowan et al., 1985). This transition is likely to be particularly challenging for parents who are also facing discrimination (Leal et al., 2021), and given the high levels of discrimination faced by TNB parents, it is crucial that their experiences are explored.

Secondly, adolescence and parenthood both represent points in the life course wherein engagement with generally cisheteronormative and therefore potentially unsupportive institutions is necessary. Adolescence, for instance, involves spending a large proportion of time in a normative environment (i.e. school), the fact of which adolescents themselves have overall limited choice. Parenthood also generally involves involvement in a number of spaces that are generally understood to be normative in nature, such as fertility, adoption and pregnancy spaces on the journey to parenthood, and playgroup and school once having become a parent. At the same time, adolescence marks a stage of development that is generally thought of as obligatory, while parenthood remains optional. Although parenthood is a life event that has typically been less common within queer and trans communities, rates of LGBTQ parenthood are increasing (Family Equality, 2019), making this period of the life course equally relevant to study. Finally, it is clear that both adolescence and the transition to parenthood are points in the life course that have been the focus of public discourse – and public controversy – about TNB lives. Theoretically, then, it makes sense to focus the study of how normativities and social structures impact upon the experiences of TNB individuals at individual, interactional and institutional levels on these two transitional periods.

Within Chapter 4, the studies will be triangulated, and their similarities and differences explored in further depth. In doing so, light will be shed on the experiences that may be common to TNB individuals across the life course, but also on to the experiences that may be unique to adolescents and/or parents.

The over-arching aim of this thesis is to explore the experiences and identities of (i) gender-diverse adolescents and (ii) trans and non-binary parents within the UK. In particular, the thesis is informed by the perspective of SSI, which suggest that identities are developed in relation to the social environment. Given that the UK environment is predicated on a number of exclusionary normativities, and that these may be enacted via both interpersonal and structural stigma, with implications for individual experiences and outcomes, the thesis ultimately aims to

understand more about the experiences of gender-diverse adolescents and TNB parents within this social context.

Chapter 2: "It sucks but I try to remain proud": gender-diverse adolescents' social experiences and identity processes

2.1: Introduction

Gender-diverse youth (particularly those who pursue medical treatment) are consistently at the centre of media attention and public debate. The UK environment is hostile: schools with LGBTQ+ initiatives, such as inclusive curricula and rainbow zebra crossings, have been targeted by protests (Busby, 2020; Parveen, 2019); sociolegal debates about access to puberty blockers for gender-diverse youth are ongoing (Holt, 2020); and provision of gender-neutral spaces are currently the subject of political debate (O'Reilly, 2020). Amid ongoing disputes about the existence and ethics of their beings, it must be remembered that gender-diverse youth, as Sinclair-Palm and Gilbert (2018, p. 321) have made clear,

> are going to school, growing up, making and losing friends, falling in and out of love, experimenting with and claiming multiple identities, and negotiating and challenging social norms.

An increasing number of young people (under 18) do not identify with the gender that corresponds to the sex category they were assigned at birth (GIDS, 2018), with 58% of 956 trans young people surveyed in the UK stating that they knew they were trans by the age of 13 (METRO, 2016). An increasing number of gender-diverse adolescents are identifying as non-binary (LGBT Youth Scotland, 2018), and it is important to note that there is no legal recognition of non-binary identities within the UK. As discussed in Chapter 1, there is a lack of legal and policy support for gender-diverse youth, such that gender-diverse youth live in a climate that denies their existence and autonomy (Roen, 2019; Travers, 2018). Given our understanding of the impact of stigma on the wellbeing of trans adults (e.g. Scandurra et al., 2017), it is crucial to understand the experiences of gender-diverse youth within this hostile climate.

Schools have been highlighted as the place where gender-diverse adolescents face the most discrimination (LGBT Youth Scotland, 2018; Wyss, 2004), and therefore this study focusses primarily on the school experiences of gender-diverse youth. This chapter makes the case for the study of the school experiences and identity processes of gender-diverse youth, in two parts. Firstly, the extant empirical research that has focussed primarily on (i) mental health, and (ii)

bullying, is reviewed.[22] The shortcomings of this literature, in particular, its focus on binary-trans youth and its largely quantitative approach, will be highlighted. Secondly, the theoretical frameworks that underpin the current study are outlined, including identity theory and stigma theory, and the way in which these relate to the study is clarified.

Empirical literature review

Mental health: important or inflammatory?

Contemporary discourse is arguably characterised by "unprecedented concern" about the mental health of LGBTQ+ youth (S. T. Russell & Fish, 2016, p. 2). Moreover, recent research has consistently found that gender-diverse young people experience significantly poorer mental health outcomes than cisgender, heterosexual youth (Becerra-Culqui et al., 2018; Connolly et al., 2016; Irish et al., 2019; Kaltiala-Heino et al., 2015; Mustanski et al., 2010; S. T. Russell & Fish, 2016). Studies have also shown that gender-diverse youth experience worse mental health outcomes and lower life satisfaction than cis LGBTQ+ youth (Alanko & Lund, 2020; LGBT Youth Scotland, 2018; Snapp, Watson, et al., 2015). In particular, a number of studies have reported extremely high levels of self-harm and suicide attempts among gender-diverse youth (Arcelus et al., 2016; Eisenberg et al., 2017; Thoma et al., 2019), with such worrying findings demonstrating the importance of understanding their experiences.

Some studies have explored the factors associated with mental health outcomes. For instance, a Canadian survey of 923 trans adolescents (14-25 years old) found that experiences of discrimination and harassment were associated with mental health problems, whereas social support was associated with more favourable outcomes (Veale et al., 2017). One study of 129 trans youth in the US found that chosen name use in multiple contexts predicted fewer depressive symptoms, less suicidal ideation and less suicidal behaviour (S. T. Russell et al., 2018). This is consistent with a minority stress perspective (I. H. Meyer, 2003; I. H. Meyer & Frost, 2013), where experiences of discrimination have been found to be associated with the higher levels of mental and physical health problems found in LGBTQ populations (e.g. Bos et al., 2004; Scandurra et al., 2017; Veale et al., 2017). Also consistent with a minority stress perspective is the finding that economic precarity is associated with poorer health in LGBTQ and gender non-conforming youth (Frost et al., 2019), pointing to the importance of considering multiple factors when understanding gender-diverse youth's experiences of health.

Whether or not a focus on negative mental health outcomes is helpful to LGBTQ youth themselves has been questioned, and the dominance of these narratives seen as "universalising

[22] Within this thesis, a number of different literature searching strategies were used, and searching was carried out at regular intervals. Strategies included looking up key terms on Scopus, regularly checking prominent journals in the field, and attending conferences in order to find new research.

and determinedly victimising" (Neary, 2018, p. 442). Moreover, preliminary research on binary-trans young children who have socially transitioned (and are supported by their parents) suggests that they experience levels of depression and self-esteem that are in line with population norms, with marginally higher anxiety (Durwood et al., 2017; Olson et al., 2016). Although these studies are only preliminary, and focus on young children, such findings would suggest that identifying as trans does not in itself lead to mental health problems (Ehrensaft, 2014). Indeed, it is important to also focus on resilience and positive outcomes – activism, for instance, has been found to have a positive impact on health for LGBTQ and gender non-conforming youth of colour (Frost et al., 2019) and gender-diverse youth's feelings about their identity (T. Jones et al., 2016)

Bullying and discrimination

Research has focussed on bullying as the key form of discrimination relevant to gender-diverse youth[23] with a recent meta-analysis finding that trans individuals were overall at a greater risk of victimisation at school than cis LGBTQ youth (Myers et al., 2020). A number of UK-specific surveys have explored gender-diverse students' experiences with bullying; LGBT Youth Scotland's survey of 684 LGBT youth found that 96% of trans young people reported bullying during their time in education and 41% of trans young people had experienced a hate crime/incident in the past year (LGBT Youth Scotland, 2018). The Youth Chances report found that 74% of 6,514 LGBTQ+ young people surveyed had experienced name calling, 45% had experienced harassment, and 23% had experienced physical assault (METRO, 2016). Preliminary research also suggests that gender-diverse students with multiple minority statuses may be at particular risk for discrimination: one US survey found that LGBTQ students with disabilities experienced a more hostile school environment and Native American/American Indian/Alaska Native students were more likely to face anti-LGBT discrimination (Kosciw et al., 2018). Overall, findings to date thus suggest that gender-diverse adolescents experience high rates of discrimination and bullying, and that this may vary according to adolescents' other identities.

Gender-diverse youth have also been found to report feeling less safe at school than cis youth (D. H. Russell et al., 2020). The UK Government's LGBT survey of over 100,000 people found that, for young people in education, 9% of the most serious incidents of victimisation were committed by teachers, and 83% of these incidents went unreported (Government Equalities Office, 2019).[24] This suggests that in addition to peers, teachers may be engaging in bullying behaviours, but this remains largely unexplored in the literature. One Australian survey found

[23] The limitations of this 'bullying-centric' approach will be discussed below (see p. 32).
[24] The number of young people in education who had responded to the survey was not reported.

that those with no teacher support were four times more likely to leave school (23% compared to 5% with support) (T. Jones et al., 2016). Students whose teachers used inappropriate language experienced increased abuse from peers and had poorer educational outcomes, suggesting that various forms of discrimination may intersect (T. Jones et al., 2016). One study with a representative sample in California found that trans youth were more likely to be victimised at school, to report negative perceptions of school, and to miss school more often than their cis peers (Day et al., 2018). These findings therefore suggest that the experiences of gender-diverse youth at school may be characterised by high levels of bullying and harassment, which may come from both students and teachers, and that such discrimination is associated with them feeling unsafe in this context.

Who is included in existing research?

Research on gender-diverse youth's experiences of mental health and bullying has tended to focus on binary-trans individuals, to the exclusion of non-binary and gender-questioning individuals (Connolly et al., 2016; Eisenberg et al., 2017). Non-binary young people may find it harder to socially transition than binary trans young people, considering the lack of a culturally intelligible narrative of non-binary identities (Frohard-Dourlent, 2018). Some recent research has begun to explore potential differences in experiences between non-binary and binary-trans students. Using data from the Youth Chances study, researchers found that binary-trans participants reported lower life satisfaction than non-binary participants (Rimes et al., 2019) and a US survey found that transgender students reported more hostile school experiences than those with genderqueer and non-binary identities (Kosciw et al., 2018). Conversely, a recent online study of youth aged 14-25 in Spain found that non-binary youth received less support from family and friends than did binary-trans adolescents (Aparicio-García et al., 2018) and a UK study of treatment-seeking binary-trans/non-binary young people found that non-binary youth experienced more anxiety and depression, and lower self-esteem, than binary-trans youth (Thorne et al., 2019). Preliminary findings are therefore mixed and more research is clearly necessary.

Research into the mental health and discrimination of questioning individuals, as a separate group, is also limited (Kosciw et al., 2018). There is a lack of research on gender-questioning young people's experiences and, methodologically, it is often unclear whether or how they are included in research. For instance, one Australian study used the term 'gender questioning' to include individuals who "identify as transgender, gender queer and 'other' than male or female" (L. Hillier et al., 2010, p. 1). This use of gender-questioning refers to all non-cis individuals and also arguably delegitimises the identities of non-cis individuals who are in fact sure about their identity. A small number of studies suggest that LGBTQ students who are questioning their

gender/sexuality experience less victimisation at school than other LGBTQ students (Kosciw et al., 2018; Myers et al., 2020), suggesting that including questioning youth in samples otherwise comprised of non-questioning LGBTQ youth may not be appropriate. Given the lack of research specifically focussing on gender-questioning youth, and the lack of clarity about whether or not they are included within existing research, it is difficult to delineate the possibly distinct experiences of those who are questioning their gender, such that further research on this topic is necessary.

Beyond bullying

As mentioned above, the literature on gender-diverse youth has focussed on experiences at an individual level, and primarily on bullying from peers. Although discussion of bullying is, of course, important, 'bullying discourse' – both within the literature and within schools themselves – arguably serves to individualise experiences of discrimination, limiting discussions of the wider underlying normativities (Formby, 2015). In other words, individualised approaches fail to attend to intergroup relations (Lloyd & Duveen, 1992; Ringrose & Renold, 2010). In terms of school policy, a distinction can therefore be made between policies which aim to protect LGBTQ+ individuals from discrimination (which arguably reinforces their deviation from cisheteronormative ideals) and more radical policies which aim to 'queer' the normative education system (Airton, 2013). When researching gender-diverse youth's experiences, it is important to recognise institutional forms of cisgenderism (Ansara & Hegarty, 2012; Gilbert et al., 2018) and also to understand more about the other oppressions that may impact TNB youth, including racism, classism and ableism (Gill-Peterson, 2018). Anti-bullying rhetoric fails to recognise that restrictive normativities are harmful to young people in general, and potentially particularly damaging for youth who are questioning their gender identity and/or who are not out at school.

It is therefore important to look 'beyond bullying' and examine the other ways in which normativities are enacted within the school environment. A number of researchers have explored the enactment of heteronormativity in school (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009; Renold, 2006; C. L. Ryan, 2016; Sunderland & Mcglashan, 2015) but cisnormativity has been infrequently studied. Lloyd and Duveen's (1992) investigation of gender in primary schools in England found that children took part in heteronormative rituals in play, and although anti-sexism was the official stance held by staff, classroom materials (such as picture books) reinforced gender norms. Equally, the individualised child-centred approach meant that teachers generally did not challenge gender normative behaviour, or examine gendered intergroup relations (Howarth, 2011). It is also important not to think about teachers solely as individuals – even if teachers are supportive of gender diversity, they may be teaching within an

unsupportive environment: a study of educators in Canada highlighted the practical difficulties of assisting gender-diverse students within cisnormative school environments (Frohard-Dourlent et al., 2017). Teachers who do wish to assist gender-diverse adolescents may not have structural and institutional support to do so, and it is therefore necessary to consider curricula and policies, in addition to teachers' roles, to fully understand the school experiences of gender-diverse adolescents.

Curricula and spaces

Within school curricula, it has been suggested that discourses of 'age-appropriateness' and 'innocence' restrict discussions about gender and sexuality to reactions to bullying (Neary, 2018; Renold, 2006). Within the UK, LGBTQ+ inclusive education is the subject of much political and social debate. Scotland has recently mandated LGBTI-inclusive education (Scottish Government, 2018), and Wales and England are reforming sex education to be named 'Relationships and Sexuality Education', inclusive of LGBTQ+ issues (Welsh Government, 2019), suggesting that inclusivity may be increasing. However, programmes (such as the 'No Outsiders' project) that aim to fundamentally challenge heteronormativity within schools have received societal backlash, such that one school in Birmingham withdrew the content from its primary education curriculum (Parveen, 2019). The Youth Chances survey of 6,514 LGBTQ+ young people found that 94% of participants reported learning nothing about trans issues (METRO, 2016) and another survey of 914 young people found that while 97% thought that sex and relationships education should be LGBT inclusive, only 5% had experienced this (Terrence Higgins Trust, 2016). This suggests that LGBTQ+ issues are rarely included within curricula, and gender diversity even less so. One US study found an association between LGBTQ inclusive curricula and higher reports of safety and lower levels of bullying (Snapp, McGuire, et al., 2015), suggesting that curricula can play a key role in fostering a supportive school environment for gender-diverse youth.

Sex-segregated spaces, common within mixed schools and manifest in single-sex schools, are predicated on a stable gender binary and are thus often exclusionary of gender-diverse individuals (Browne, 2004). One mixed-methods study focussed on gender-diverse youth's experiences within school bathrooms, finding that most youth felt unsafe in these spaces, and that feeling unsafe was associated with greater mental health difficulties and lower quality of life (Weinhardt et al., 2017). Another US study of trans and non-binary adolescents found that youth with gender-restricted school toilets and changing rooms were more likely to experience sexual assault (Murchison et al., 2019), highlighting the interaction between social policy and victimisation.

Due to sex-segregated spaces being based on divisions of 'boy' and 'girl', it is possible that binary-trans students may be able to transition within the binary school environment, whereas non-binary students might further be impacted by transnormativity (Beemyn, 2015; Frohard-Dourlent, 2018). Additionally, as aforementioned, although in the UK young people under 18 cannot legally change their gender from male to female, there is societal recognition that this is possible in adulthood. On the contrary, non-binary genders exist in a 'legal vacuum' (Neary, 2018), and lack any kind of legal recognition. Non-binary genders also arguably exist within a social vacuum, as there is minimal societal understanding about non-binary genders (Darwin, 2017). Studies of the impact of single-sex spaces upon the UK school experiences of gender-diverse youth in general, and non-binary youth specifically, are currently lacking.

Qualitative research

Much of the research on gender-diverse adolescents' experiences is quantitative, and there is little qualitative research with gender-diverse youth themselves (Travers et al., 2020). There are a few notable exceptions from the US. One study interviewed 22 trans, racially diverse youth aged 16-21, examining participants' strategies for managing discrimination through the framework of 'situated agency' (A. Hillier et al., 2020).[25] Participants were described as agents, as they used diverse strategies to navigate the school environment, but this agency was also found to be constrained by a lack of support at school. In another study, Travers (2018) interviewed 19 trans youth and 23 parents of trans youth, finding that children used a number of strategies to cope with the 'gender order', ranging from 'sucking it up' or living a double life, to transitioning and/or embracing non-binary identities. Participants also engaged in activism and education, hoping to enact social change for other trans youth. Within schools, the participants in Travers' (2018) study were found to experience high levels of discrimination, including experiences of assault and bullying, echoing the quantitative findings reported above (p. 30).

Travers' (2018) study distinguished between binary-trans and non-binary identities, suggesting that youth with both binary-trans and non-binary identities can be seen as vulnerable, due to societal norms, but that binary identities may be "easier for many people to understand and accept and for mainstream institutions to adapt to and integrate" (Travers, 2018, p. 33). Youth who experienced their identity as fluid found that their identity explorations were not taken seriously or were punished, highlighting the impact of assumptions about the stability of gender identity. In another study, Travers (2020) interviewed gender-diverse young people (aged 16-21) finding again that, if presenting in a binary-way, participants experienced more institutional

[25] Strategies identified included avoiding, ignoring, selectively sharing, teaching and advocating, arguing and fighting, seeking support and making changes (A. Hillier et al., 2020)

accommodation. Research within the US has found that non-binary college students reported difficulties with navigating the binary system and feeling compelled to be a 'gender educator' to others (A. Goldberg & Kuvalanka, 2018). These findings highlight a need to further explore the potential differences between binary-trans and non-binary youth's school experiences from a qualitative perspective, particularly in the UK context, where a different legal framework is in operation.

Within the UK, there has been a lack of qualitative research on the experiences of gender-diverse adolescents at school. One study of LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ 12-14 year olds within England focussed on their views about gender diversity inside and outside of school (Bragg et al., 2018). In this research, LGBTQ+ participants spoke of 'pockets' of life where they felt free to be themselves with respect to gender and sexuality, while also articulating their experiences of the persistence of the gender binary within schools. Participants described the way that teachers and schools supported them with specific initiatives (such as feminist or LGBTQ+ clubs), yet that the *structure* of school was inherently binary and consistently sex-segregated. Whilst this study is valuable in understanding young people's experiences of gender, it is not without its limitations, particularly insofar as it was based on a sample of young people between the ages of 12-14, and, most of the participants in this study were cis (although some were part of LGBTQ+ groups). More qualitative research is therefore required to understand gender-diverse adolescents' UK school experiences in general, and the experiences of older adolescents in particular.

One recent study interviewed 23 parents in the UK who were supportive of their trans and gender-diverse children, finding that there was an absence of proactive policies to support gender-diverse youth – instead, parents noted that schools demonstrated support by reactively changing policy when a student came out (Davy & Cordoba, 2019). Importantly, Davy and Cordoba (2019) noted that changes in school practices that accommodate a binary-trans student would not necessarily support a non-binary student, again reinforcing the need to explore their experiences separately. Moreover, as research on gender-diverse youth has tended to rely on parents as gatekeepers (Davy & Cordoba, 2019; Travers, 2018), the experiences of adolescents without parental support have not yet been studied. Given that gender-diverse youth report poorer relationships with their parents overall than do cis youth (Alanko & Lund, 2020), it is important that studies employ sampling methods that do not require the consent of parents (who may not be aware, or supportive) of gender-diverse young people, so that they may themselves take part in research.

Having reviewed the literature relevant to gender-diverse adolescents, it is clear that although there is a large body of research on mental health and bullying, there are a number of gaps in

the literature that together justify the present research. Firstly, the high rates of school discrimination, and associated mental health issues, indicate the importance of investigating the school experiences of gender-diverse youth within the UK. Secondly, given the bullying-centric focus, it is necessary for multiple aspects of the school environment to be studied. Thirdly, gender-diverse youth have a diverse range of gender identities, but research to date has tended to focus on the narratives of binary-trans individuals, and largely failed to distinguish between different identities and potential differences in social experiences, suggesting that research that explores potential within-group differences would be useful. Indeed, while non-binary youth are thought to be increasing in number (LGBT Youth Scotland, 2018), research rarely focusses on their experiences separately, and where it has done so there are mixed findings. Equally, those who are questioning their identity may have different social experiences, but their school experiences have been unexplored up to this point.

In order to examine the way in which school might affect the identities and experiences of gender-diverse youth, it is necessary to engage with sociological and social psychological theories of the self and identity. The theoretical framework used within this study is that of structural symbolic interactionism (as described within Chapter 1), and its relevance and intricacies with regards to the study of gender-diverse adolescents' experiences at school will be explained in the upcoming section. This framework is unique, and has yet to be used to understand the identity processes of gender-diverse adolescents. [26]

Theories of the self and identity

Gender and identity theory

Chapter 1 outlined the importance of SSI, a perspective that holds that the self is interconnected with society. As SSI makes clear, society, and the social groups within it, are fundamental to the existence of the self, and identity theory[27] relates the idea of multiple aspects of the self to multiple, discrete identities according to social groups (Sheldon Stryker, 1968). The self can be defined as the organised structure of discrete identities based on group membership (Sheldon Stryker, 1968), and identities (also referred to as role identities) can be defined as the set of

[26] More commonly used is Butler's framework of gender performativity. However, as this thesis makes clear, the self and its development are inherently social and interactional, and thus a social psychological theorisation is more appropriate than Butler's theorisation to this work. Butler argues against a Goffmanian view of the self "which assumes and exchanges various 'roles'" arguing instead that the self is "irretrievably 'outside'" (Butler, 1988, p. 528). Butler therefore refutes the idea that the self comes into being through social interaction (she argues the internal self to be a fabrication), and this does not align with the theoretical framework used within this thesis (Brickell, 2003).

[27] There are a number of social psychological theories of identity, including identity theory (Burke, 2000) and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Given the SSI approach of this thesis, identity theory (as borne out of SSI) was deemed the most appropriate, given that it rests on the same theoretical framework. Additionally, social identity theory may be seen as being more appropriate for psychological social psychology due to its focus on cognitive processes (Hogg et al., 1995).

meanings applied to the self in a social role that define who one is (Burke, 2000; Burke & Tully, 1977).

Identity theory also suggests that different identities occupy different spaces in a *salience hierarchy*: higher in this hierarchy means that an identity will be more often invoked in given situations (Burke & Stets, 2009). One identity that is seemingly invoked in all situations, and thus high in the salience hierarchy, is that of gender (Burke & Tully, 1977; Sheldon Stryker, 1968).[28] In fact, West and Zimmerman's (1987, p. 129) interactional account of gender suggested that "gender itself is constituted through interaction". These scholars theorised that gender (as an aspect of the self) is something that is 'done' repeatedly in social interactions, rather than something that one has; in other words, it is an activity, not a fixed identity category. It is a "routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 126) that becomes compulsory when we consider that any trait can be seen as either 'masculine' or 'feminine' (and is assumed to be a sign of someone's 'essential' sex category-based nature (i.e. male or female), leading people to be categorised as such (Kessler & McKenna, 1978; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Scholars have theorised that accountability, meaning orientation to a sex category (i.e. male or female), underlies this process, such that individuals must be categorised as one or the other in order to be culturally intelligible (Hollander, 2013). In this process, gender becomes self-regulated and other-regulated. This legitimises the two sex categories and the 'natural differences' that underpin their distinction. Due to an underlying assumption of a 'natural' sex-based dichotomy, it is assumed that there are "two and only two" genders (Lucal, 1999, p. 781), within which all members of society are categorised (McKenna & Kessler, 2006).

Interactionist theories of gender, structural symbolic interactionism and identity theory are not often presented together in a unified framework, but there are clear reasons for doing so. Based on identity theory and structural symbolic interactionism, it becomes clear that identities (as they relate to aspects of the self) are socially constituted, reinforced, and situated. The resistance of gender, as an organising principle, to change suggests that processes of structural interactionism, explored in the framework of structural symbolic interactionism, are worthy of study (Sheldon Stryker & Burke, 2000). Equally, identity theory is useful as a means of describing the way in which membership of social groups is linked to different identities, which may be enacted to a greater or lesser extent in different situations. However, identity theory and structural symbolic interactionism are together insufficient to describe the ways in which gender is done and the effects of its constancy on individuals who may not fit within the binary

[28] In accordance with the principles of intersectionality (see Chapter 3) it is worth noting that here that gender is not the only identity category that is salient across all situations (West & Fenstermaker, 1995).

gender system. On this, approaches that recognise the *doing* of gender are important in theorising the assumed naturalness of gender norms, and their effects.

Doing, redoing, undoing gender?

For those who do not do gender in a way that is easily recognisable according to the principles of cisheteronormativity, theorists have suggested that they 'undo gender' (Butler, 2004; Whitley, 2013), 'redo gender' (West & Zimmerman, 2009), 'do transgender' (Connell, 2010), 'do gender beyond the binary' (Darwin, 2017), and 'do sex in a gendered world' (Dozier, 2005). Despite the many conceptualisations of the ways in which gender-diverse individuals do gender differently, it is worth remembering that they do not 'do gender' more than cis people (see also Vidal-Ortiz, 2009); rather, it is the way in which they do gender that exposes gender as an activity. Put differently, it could be said that the existence of diverse gender identities makes evident the socially constructed nature of gender categories (Butler, 2004; Riggs, 2014).[29]

In traditional frameworks of the performative nature of gender, it is assumed that gender is the "socially constructed correlate of sex" (Dozier, 2005, p. 314). However, such an assumption does not account for the experiences of gender-diverse individuals, the study of which evidences the fact that gendered attribution is based on sex category attribution – rather than the other way around. Regarding the prominence of accountability, it has been acknowledged that for those with non-binary identities, "presenting identity narratives that appear consistent is uniquely challenging" (Garrison, 2018, p. 619). Through gendered pronouns, and sex-segregated spaces, the gender binary is consistently upheld as individuals are continually assigned to a sex category. The emphasis on this assignation indeed explains why, for instance, gender-diverse individuals may be held accountable to a binary medical model of their transition (Darwin, 2017; Johnson, 2016; shuster, 2017).

Gender categorisation is therefore a potential site of stress for gender-diverse individuals; indeed, it may result in what Westbrook & Schilt (2014) described as 'gender panics', that is the policing of gender particularly, but not exclusively, within sex-segregated spaces, such as bathrooms. In such cases, gender-diverse individuals may be required to do gender in a way that is not appropriate for them. It is noteworthy that Goffman himself summarised in 1977 the 'institutional reflexivity' inherent in bathrooms:

> Toilet segregation is presented as a natural consequence of the difference between the sex-classes, when in fact it is rather a means of honoring, if not producing, this (Goffman, 1977, p. 316).

[29] Riggs (2014, p. 159) suggests that this research is "to some degree suspect", as it treats trans people as objects rather than active subjects (see p. 16 for discussion of history of research on gender-diverse individuals).

Therefore, sex-segregated spaces create a situation in which the doing of gender is particularly salient, as they require that one's gender be easily readable and attributable (Browne, 2004). Considering the ubiquity of sex-segregated spaces within UK schools, such insights are important. Moreover, given that binary-trans, non-binary and gender questioning youth occupy differing spaces in/outside the gender binary, exploring the potential differences in their experiences in the sex-segregated context of school makes good sense.

Reflected appraisals

Given the SSI premise that identity is formed through interaction, it is clear that what we think that others think about us is highly important for our own understanding of our identity. These are termed 'reflected appraisals', referring to the ways in which we think that others perceive us, rather than how they actually perceive us (Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979). It is clear that reflected appraisals are a key aspect of the self: in Cooley's (1902) work, for instance, reflected appraisals are crucial to the 'looking-glass self', and in Mead's (1934) work, the appraisals of others are theorised in the notion of the 'generalised other'.

It follows that identity (and therefore the self) would be under threat in the face of negative reflected appraisals. Identity threat, as defined by Petriglieri (2011, p. 641), refers to "experiences appraised as indicating potential harm to the value, meanings, or enactment of an identity". Therefore, perceived negative reflected appraisals represent a threat to identity, and to the self. Such identity threats are thought to be especially challenging for individuals with heavily stigmatised or threatened identities. As Kaufman and Johnson (2004, p. 812) ask,

> If one's conception of self and the importance of one's identity depend so strongly on social relationships and social interactions, how does an individual develop and sustain a stigmatised identity*?*

For the purposes of the present study, this question could be further nuanced: how do gender-diverse adolescents develop and sustain their gender identity in the context of a social environment which is predicated on a (presumed) 'natural' and static gender binary? To address this, it is necessary to draw upon theories relating to stigma, identity work, and the developmental time-point of adolescence.

The moral career of the stigmatised

Goffman's (1963) seminal work on stigma represents one useful lens through which to understand how gender-diverse individuals sustain their identities in a society based on normativities that exclude their identities. His analysis, based on the premise of symbolic interactionism, holds that "the nature of an individual…is generated by the nature of [their]

group affiliations" (Goffman, 1963).[30] Goffman defined stigma as an aspect of identity that is 'spoiled' and devalued within society – importantly noting that stigma is "a language of relationships, not attributes" (Goffman, 1963, p. 13), locating stigma within interactions, rather than the individual. Goffman also distinguished between those individuals who are discredited – with an evident stigma – and those who are discreditable – with a concealable stigma, which thus requires disclosure.[31]

In particular, Goffman's work focussed on the' moral career' of the stigmatised person, which he understood to be a constant negotiation and management of their identity in social situations, which thus becomes integral to their self-identity. This concept of the moral career is valuable to understanding the way in which those with a stigmatised identity can sustain their identity in the context of negative reflected appraisals. However, Goffman's collection of essays concludes with the idea that stigmatised individuals are ultimately accepting of their social status and of the negative appraisals of others, leaving little room for resistance. For instance, Goffman suggested that stigmatised individuals may achieve 'phantom acceptance' and 'phantom normalcy' by accepting the view of themselves as predicated by societal norms, thus allowing for a semblance of acceptance that does not challenge dominant narratives (Goffman, 1963). Indeed, several limitations to this framework have been noted, such as its focus on dichotomous reactions: social hostility or acceptance (Orne, 2011), and its overemphasis on the passivity of the stigmatised (Siegel et al., 1998). Instead, seeing the stigmatised as "agents not objects" (Howarth, 2006, p. 442) is important.

"Agents not objects" (Howarth, 2006)

According to Goffman (1963), stigma management is a process that occurs wherever there are identity norms. Seen in this way, stigma management is a constant process for gender-diverse individuals: "to display or not to display; to tell or not to tell; to let on or not to let on; to lie or not to lie; and in each case, to whom, how, when and where" (Goffman, 1963, p. 57). Relatedly, a large body of research has focussed on the strategies used and work done by individuals to limit the impact of negative reflected appraisals on the self (Burke, 2000; Goffman, 1967; Petriglieri, 2011; Siegel et al., 1998; D A Snow & Anderson, 1987; Sykes & Matza, 1957). Broadly understood as concerned with 'identity work', this literature cuts across the fields of sociology,

[30] The pronouns used in Goffman's work are consistently masculine (West, 1996), and thus have been altered in this thesis in accordance with gender-inclusive language (Zimman, 2017).
[31] Goffman also highlighted the importance of social others, including 'sympathetic others' (those who share the stigmatised identity) and the 'wise' (allies who do not share the identity, but do not have a negative view of it).

social psychology and organisational psychology, such that concepts tend to be poorly defined or duplicated (A. D. Brown, 2015).[32]

Both theoretical and empirical insights from the literature would suggest that individuals can maintain a positive sense of identity despite high levels of stigma. In relation to this, the relevance of Du Bois' (1903) notion of "double consciousness" has been highlighted.[33] Double consciousness can be used to describe the way in which stigmatised individuals are able to see themselves both through the eyes of others and through their own 'lens'. The idea has since been extended to that of a 'quadruple consciousness' (Mitchell & Means, 2014), to reference the way in which individuals with multiple stigmatised identities may have multiple consciousnesses. The implications of these concepts are that while individuals may be aware of the negative connotations of their stigmatised identities, they may also construct other understandings of their identities through the process of identity work. As the normativities and stigmas affecting binary-trans, non-binary and gender-questioning individuals may differ depending on both identity and local context(s), it is necessary to examine their experiences of identity work separately.

The literature on identity work and stigma management is therefore crucial to understanding the way in which gender-diverse individuals navigate the social world. Research on identity work to date has not examined the work undertaken by the diverse range of individuals under the umbrella of 'gender-diverse individuals', nor has it done so through this theoretical perspective.

Feedback loop of identity

Returning to the idea of the self as "both subject and object" (Mead, 1934, p. 137), scholars of symbolic interactionism have considered the self and/or identity as the result of what we might term a 'feedback loop'. More recently, identity control theory, borne out of structural symbolic interactionism (Burke, 2000), conceptualises identity as a control system, composed of four components. The 'identity standard' is the set of self-defined meanings for a given identity and 'inputs' are perceptions of the meanings of the situation in which the identity is relevant (i.e. reflected appraisals), which are compared to the identity standard by the 'comparator'.

[32] For instance, identity work, as defined by Snow & Anderson (1987, p. 1348), is "the range of activities individuals engage in to create, present and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept". This concept is similar to that of Goffman's (1967, p. 12) 'face-work': "the actions taken by a person to make whatever [they are] doing consistent with face", face being the positive social value a person experiences based on the meanings made by others in social interaction.

[33] Du Bois's early sociological work on double consciousness focussed on the experiences of African Americans in the twentieth century. He described "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (Du Bois, 1903, p. 3).

Differences that arise between self-defined meanings and situational meanings are said to lead to an 'error signal' – and the 'output', being the final component of identity, describes an individual's behaviour following the error signal (Burke, 2000; Burke & Stets, 2009). In this approach, identity is therefore established as the outcome of the constant feedback loop, whereby perceptions of meanings in the environment are being continuously compared to self-defined meanings. Where there is incongruence in this identity verification process, there is the potential for decreased self-esteem, and a corresponding need for behaviour or the meanings *ascribed* to an identity to change (Burke & Stets, 2009).[34] This theory offers an important extension to the other theories presented here, in that it theorises the differences between self-defined and other-defined meanings, and the potential for incongruence to impact self-esteem. This facilitates an understanding of the significance and implications of understanding the social experiences of individuals whose identities do not correspond to gender norms.

Identity development within adolescence

Having discussed structural symbolic interactionism, identity theory, and theories of stigma, a discussion of the research on young people's identity development now follows. Much of the literature within symbolic interactionism has focussed on the adult population, yet research has long highlighted adolescence as a critical time for identity formation and development (Erikson, 1994). It has been suggested that, due to the proliferation of roles in adolescence, this developmental stage may reflect the start of the differentiation of the self and resultant multiple identities (Harter et al., 1997; W. James, 1890). For instance, Erikson's (1994) theory of psychosocial development suggests that the key psychosocial conflict to be resolved in adolescence is that of identity vs identity confusion.

Adolescence is also a time in which peer relationships become increasingly important (S. T. Russell & Fish, 2016), making the study of young people's social experiences especially relevant. However, there is a lack of research examining identity development (and work) among gender-diverse adolescents, despite the fact that adolescence is a time when individuals may be not only developing their identities, but also experiencing a heightened 'spotlight effect' (Gilovich et al., 2000). Indeed, attending secondary school may, for many adolescents, mean "daily attendance at a school where binary gender and other norms are fiercely policed" (Roen, 2019, p. 52). More generally, adolescence represents a unique stage at which the development of identities, and in particular gender identity, may be significant, yet autonomy and decision-making remains restricted (particularly with regards to family, peers and school, see Roen,

[34] For instance, if a non-binary individual's understanding of what their gender identity means is incongruent with the meanings of others (who may hold a negative view of this identity), this may lead to decreased self-esteem, and ICT suggests that this would mean that the individual would aim to change either the situational meanings or their own understanding of their identity.

2019). Adolescence, at least in this context, is therefore characterised by dependency-related vulnerability, and a lack of choice about the school environment in which young people spend their time. Adolescence also represents a time at which young people may have little experience with navigating social environments and negotiating their identity. Identity work, and the protection and development of identities, may therefore be particularly crucial and thus worthy of study.[35]

This study

Having discussed the empirical literature on gender-diverse adolescents and the theoretical framework on structural symbolic interactionism, it is clear that there are a number of gaps within the existing research on gender-diverse adolescents. As the discussion above made clear, research on gender-diverse youth to date has focussed primarily on experiences of bullying and mental health outcomes, and there has been less empirical and theoretical consideration of the link between discrimination and identity development among this group. Moreover, the 'bullying-centric' approach gives little consideration to the normativities that underlie the experiences of gender-diverse youth in general, and experiences of discrimination and bullying in particular. It is clear, therefore, that to understand the identity development of gender-diverse young people it is important to examine the structure and norms within the school context, of which they are mandated, by law, to be a part.

Given that the existing research on gender-diverse youth has found their experiences to be characterised, at least in part, by experiences of discrimination, further study on this topic from the perspective of SSI and theories of stigma management and identity work is well warranted. Theoretically speaking, identities (as they relate to aspects of the self) are rooted in, and the consequence of, social interaction. As described above, stigma theory explains the ways in which stigmatised identities can be sustained in the face of negative reflected appraisals (i.e. through identity work and stigma management). Moreover, although existing research on gender-diverse youth does not distinguish between different groups (such as binary trans, non-binary and gender questioning youth), from a theoretical perspective, it is evident that individuals with different gender identities may have different experiences.[36] Therefore, when

[35] Given that adolescence is a crucial stage for identity development, one possible way to examine the experiences of gender-diverse adolescents would be through an explicitly developmental lens. However, this thesis decided to take an SSI approach, due to its useful conceptualisation of identity as a dynamic process, which develops in relation to the social environment. However, developmental perspectives were important in understanding the potentially unique experiences of adolescents, and they have therefore been explored within the thesis. Additionally, the way in which childhood can be understood as a social construct will be further explored in the discussion (p. 91).

[36] It should be noted that *experiences* here refers not only to social experiences (such as reflected appraisals) but also experiences of identity work and stigma management, as identities are interactional in nature.

taking an SSI approach, studying the experiences of binary-trans, non-binary, and gender-questioning youth separately may be highly beneficial.

"On the same side of the world" (Davy, 2019)

Scholars such as Roen (2019, p. 61) have suggested that the "notion of (trans) youth being simply divided between those who are binary-identified and those who are not…limits the possibilities open to gender non-conforming children and young people". As such, it is worth making clear that the aim of the present study is not to oppose non-binary identities with binary-trans identities – indeed, "transsexual and genderqueer people are often on the same side of the world against which they protest" (Davy, 2019, p. 93). However, an approach that recognises the construction of categories within the category of 'gender-diverse' is crucial in order to fully understand the diversity of experiences among gender-diverse populations (Bragg et al., 2018), particularly when considering the way in which research has tended to focus on binary-trans identities. Given that those identifying as binary-trans, non-binary and gender-questioning may have different social experiences and related identity processes, it is necessary to deconstruct the category of 'gender-diverse' into further subcategories.

This study takes a unique approach of examining the social experiences and identity processes of binary-trans, non-binary and gender-questioning adolescents in the UK. Considering the rising number of adolescents questioning their gender and identifying with a diverse range of identities, it is important to understand more about their experiences. Additionally, gender-diverse adolescents are clearly living in a society which is not only ill-accommodating of them, but which also limits their legal and social existence. The study of their experiences within school, and the potential impact on of these their identity development, is therefore much needed.

Research questions

Given this, this study addresses two research questions (RQs):

1) What are the school experiences and identity processes of binary-trans, non-binary and gender-questioning adolescents?
2) To what extent do the school experiences and identity processes of binary-trans, non-binary and gender gender-questioning youth differ?

2.2: Methods

Primary data collection

The present study draws upon data initially collected as part of a questionnaire-based study conducted by the Centre for Family Research in collaboration with Stonewall, the UK LGBTQ+

charity. The survey was promoted through schools, social media and youth organisations, and was open to young people aged 11-19 who identified as LGBT and lived in England, Scotland or Wales. The survey was available to complete in English or Welsh, and either online or on paper. Importantly, a waiver of parental consent was granted to protect young people who had not disclosed their LGBTQ+ identity to parents/guardians, overcoming issues with previous research, where parents have acted as gatekeepers to adolescents' participation in research on this topic.[37]

Data were collected from November 2016 – February 2017. The survey was based on the protocol of a previous study (conducted in 2012 by the Centre for Family Research and Stonewall, Guasp et al., 2012), with the latest version including questions relating to gender-diverse young people. A total of 3,713 LGBT young people aged 11-19 completed the questionnaire, making it the largest survey of LGBT young people in the UK to date. Twenty-three respondents completed paper surveys, with the rest completing the survey online. The survey consisted of open-ended and closed questions, and the present study is focussed on participants' responses to the open-ended questions. The open-ended questions covered different aspects of the school environment, including school set-up ("Lots of things in schools are often separated by gender, including toilets, changing rooms and uniforms. There are also different things schools can do to support trans pupils. Do you have any comments?"), school responses to students coming out ("Is there anything else, positive or negative, you'd like to tell us about your experience of talking to your school about being trans?"), language ("Is there anything you would like to say about the use of homophobic, biphobic or transphobic language, what happens when students or staff hear it and how you would like the school to respond?"), bullying ("Please tell us more about what happened when you were bullied - what happened, how long it went on for, if anyone tried to help, how you felt – anything that helps to understand what it is was like for you."), the impact of bullying ("Is there anything you'd like to say about the impact that homophobic, biphobic or transphobic bullying has had on your school work and plans for future education?") and positive factors at school ("Are there any particular things that have been done in your school or any of the schools you've been in that have made a positive

[37] Whether or not to obtain parental consent for adolescent participation in research is something that has received much scholarly debate. On the one hand, it has been suggested that adolescents (particularly younger adolescents) are not able to give informed consent, due to their levels of cognitive development and life experience (Flicker & Guta, 2008). On the other hand, requirements of parental consent for research on sensitive topics, such as the experiences of LGBTQ+ youth, risk potentially outing youth to unsupportive parents or otherwise silencing the voices of those most in need of support (Flicker & Guta, 2008; Sims & Nolen, 2021). Given that the youth within this study often lacked support from both parents and schools, waiving parental consent was clearly well justified. Despite this waiver, participants' wellbeing was considered at all stages of the research, for instance, participants were offered links to support organisations at both the end of the survey, and on the pages of the survey that asked about mental health specifically.

difference to you and other LGBT students?"). In addition to these questions, which map on to the research questions of this study, questions were also asked about experiences of self-harm and suicide, support received from health services, experiences of coming out, role models and hopes for the future (for a list of all questions from which responses were analysed within this study, see Appendix 1).[38]

Using a pre-existing dataset

Conducting analyses of secondary data has the benefit of being cost-effective, time-effective, and requiring no new time/effort from participants (Doolan et al., 2017). It has been highlighted that qualitative secondary analysis in particular is under-utilised, but effective, as it allows for the opportunity to explore previously understudied dimensions of the research (Sherif, 2018). Within this study, the data of all LGBT respondents had been analysed as a whole (Bradlow et al., 2017) but the responses from gender-diverse participants had not been subject to separate and/or in-depth qualitative analysis. Therefore, given the large number of participants reached, this pre-existing dataset represented a unique opportunity to explore the experiences of a large sample of gender-diverse youth.

Using a pre-existing dataset is not without limitations and these primarily stem from the fact that the dataset is unlikely to be the same as one that the researcher would have designed themselves (Doolan et al., 2017). Therefore, the limitations of this dataset will be explored below.

Reconstituting the dataset

The original sample of 3,713 respondents was reduced to 683 respondents based on a number of factors. Participants (and all of their responses) were excluded if:

- they identified as cis. This was based on two questions in the survey: 'are you trans' with the responses yes, no or unsure/questioning and 'what is your gender' with the responses male, female and "if you prefer to use your own term, please provide it here: -_____".
- they were aged 11-12 or 18-19, so that the final dataset focussed only on adolescents at secondary school or college, as opposed to university
- if they had gender identities that resisted classification as either binary-trans, non-binary or gender-questioning (such as 'robot', 'furry female', 'currently male but I like to be female' (n=5))

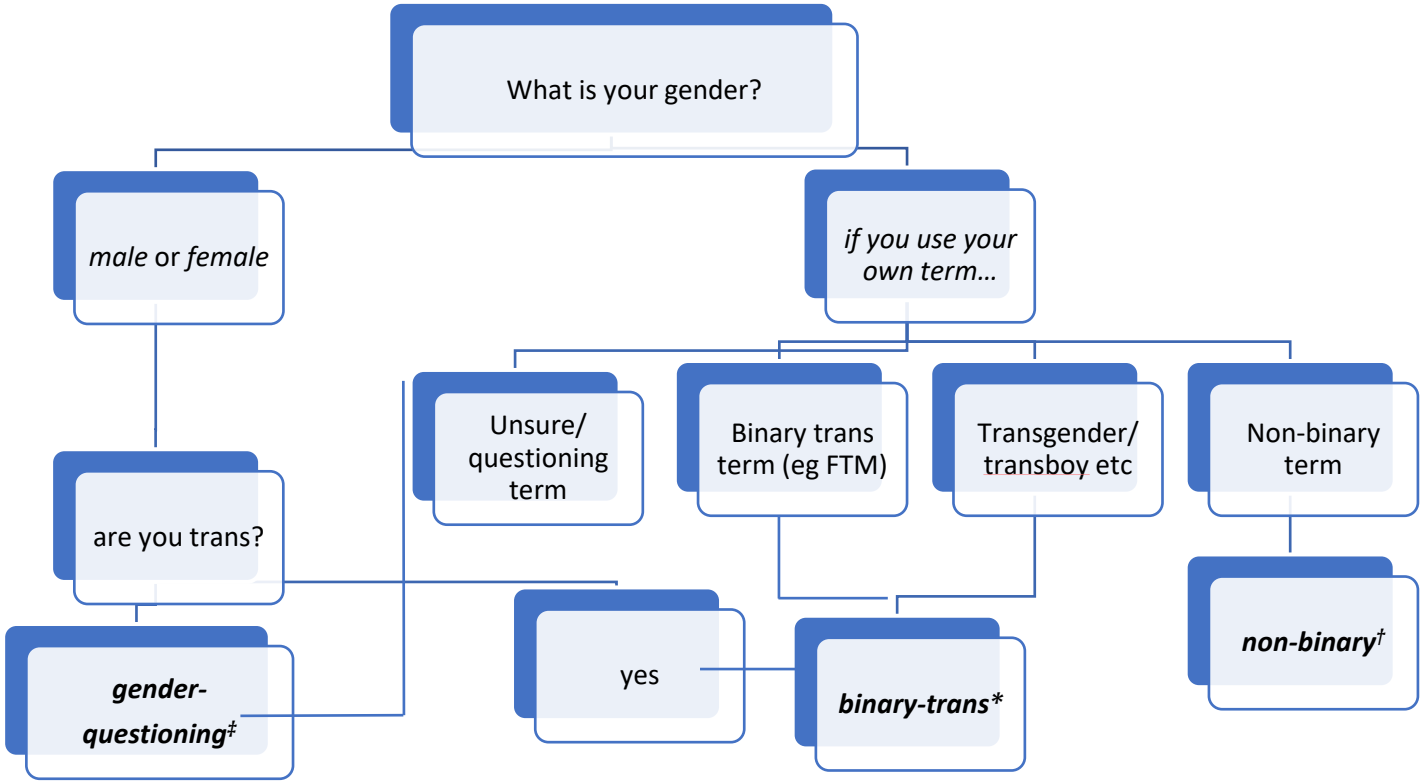
[38] Although the RQs focus on school experiences, all participants' open-ended responses were analysed. This was because participants often referenced school in responses to other questions, and therefore all data were coded by only relevant codes included in the analysis.

If participants responded ‘yes’ or ‘unsure/questioning’ to the first questions and/or gave their own term to describe their gender, their responses were retained in this dataset. The inclusion criteria were deliberately broad (i.e. inclusive of anyone who did not identify as cis), due to the narrow focus of the previous literature. Respondents were then categorised as binary-trans, non-binary or gender-questioning, based on their responses to the aforementioned two questions in the survey.

Gender categorisation

Categorisation was based on the process detailed in Figure 1, and after this process 303 participants were included in the binary-trans category, 272 were included in the non-binary category and 108 included in the gender-questioning category.

Figure 1: Flow chart detailing the study's categorisation process



Examples of participants' identities:

* trans boy, trans girl

† non-binary, agender

‡ gender-questioning boy, non-binary but unsure

Categorising a pre-existing dataset

The two-part assessment of gender identity in this study was advantageous in a number of ways: questions were clearly worded, participants were allowed to self-identify with their own term and responding with uncertainty was an option. However, the current method was not without its limitations, particularly when constructing the categories of binary-trans, non-binary, and gender-questioning. For instance, due to the two-part assessment process, when categorising participants, the default question used was 'what is your gender'. In other words, if participants gave a non-binary term when asked 'what is your gender' (as opposed to choosing male or female), then their answer to the question 'are you trans' was deemed irrelevant. For instance, if a participant gave their gender as 'demigirl' they were categorised as non-binary, regardless of whether they answered yes, no or unsure/questioning to 'are you trans'. This process aimed to respect participants' self-defined identities as much as possible, but points to the difficulties of imposing categories on pre-designed measures.

Moreover, although this approach did allow for participants to enter their own terms, the survey overall was not entirely effective in including participants with non-binary and gender-questioning identities. In particular, some non-binary participants did identify as trans, and some did not, something that has also been found in studies of non-binary adults (see e.g. Darwin, 2020).[39] One section of the questionnaire asked questions only to those who had replied 'yes' to the question 'are you trans?', thus meaning that these questions were not asked of a number of non-binary and gender-questioning participants. Additionally, recruitment materials for the survey advertised the original research as focussed on LGBT young people, as opposed to LGBTQ+ young people, which potentially discouraged non-binary and gender-questioning people from participating.

Finally, the survey did not include a measure of sex assigned at birth (SAAB). Some studies do report SAAB due to its importance in the way that gender-diverse individuals are treated at school. However, studies that rely on SAAB risk privileging this information over participants' gender identities, leading to the criticism that such research is cisgenderist, in that it delegitimises participants' own understandings of their gender (Ansara & Hegarty, 2012; Travers, 2018). Therefore, despite the issues outlined here, the measure of gender in this survey was appropriate for capturing participants' self-defined identities, and avoided the common pitfalls of other surveys, which include, for example, having no options beyond male/female and/or confusing gender with sex and/or sexuality (Westbrook & Saperstein, 2015).[40]

[39] 25% of the non-binary participants (n=25) identified as non-binary, but responded 'no' to being trans.
[40] For example, one recent study on trans youth assessed gender identity/sexuality via a single item: "Which of the following best describes you? (Mark all that apply): (a) Heterosexual (straight); (b) Gay or

Theoretical challenges of categorisation

It is recognised that categorising people who may see their gender as uncategorisable is potentially problematic, and that social categories themselves are socially constructed and historically situated (Gillespie et al., 2012). Equally, identity categories are themselves inherently power laden, such that categorising someone as gender-diverse potentially positions this as 'abnormal' (Thompson & King, 2015) – for instance, by referring to a cis boy as just a boy, and a trans boy as a trans boy, this positions cis as the default 'normal'. As Bragg et al. (2018, p.422) have recognised, research practices "create rather than simply 'find' gender formations" and it can be stated that "a danger arises when those categories come to be seen as valid descriptions of experience rather than as tools used to apprehend that experience" (Valentine, 2004, p. 217). In other words, if categories are relied on uncritically, then this becomes problematic, and research risks upholding or valorising categories which are themselves limiting (Fine et al., 2018; Gillespie et al., 2012; Zadeh, 2017).

Categories were utilised within this study for a number of reasons. Due to the prominence of the gender binary within the school environment, it is important to examine the potential differences among young people's social experiences according to their self-defined identities. In other words, social categories are relevant to the way that individuals are perceived and treated, and it is therefore important to understand how experiences may differ by category. This is particularly important when aiming to understand different experiences of discrimination (Fine et al., 2018) to enable the effective targeting of support. Moreover, no research to date has looked at binary-trans, non-binary and gender-questioning adolescents' experiences separately, making the categories employed in the current study part of a valuable exploration of the potential differences and similarities in participants' experiences. This categorisation was made in order to overcome the pitfalls of previous research, where discussion of non-binary identities has been minimised (Darwin, 2017) and the experiences of gender-questioning individuals (almost) entirely neglected. Additionally, research that aims to produce both academic and non-academic outputs can use categories to make findings more easily understood.

Social psychologists will continue to wrestle with the way in which categories can be used effectively and, to be clear, the categories employed in this study are not intended to make any claims about inherent differences, nor to deploy a hierarchical system of categorisation where the "both-neither" non-binary category is conceptually privileged as revolutionary over the "either-or" transgender category (see e.g. Roen, 2002, p. 505). The analytic strategy used

Lesbian or Bisexual; (c) Transgender; (d) Not sure; (e) Decline to respond." (Day et al., 2018, p. 1735). Firstly, there is no option for "own term" and secondly, single-item measures reinforce a mistaken notion that being trans is a sexual orientation (Susan Stryker, 2008a; Watson et al., 2019).

(described in greater detail on p. 56) arguably overcomes some of the issues inherent to categorisation, insofar as participants' identities, individualities and experiences are described in 'rich detail' (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, participants' self-defined gender identities have been included, and their responses included verbatim. Categorisation, therefore, has not been used to reduce participants to their gender identities, or to make (normative) claims about the groups of which they are considered a part. Rather it has been used as a tool to reflect the potential heterogeneity in the experiences of gender-diverse adolescents, and has been done in such a way that facilitates the richness and breadth of data analysis.

Analysis of secondary data

In the analytic process, the dataset was firstly reduced using stratified random sampling, due to time and resource constraints. Due to the study's focus on open-ended questions, and use of in-depth qualitative analysis, participants were excluded if they answered fewer than 7 of 13 possible open-ended questions, reducing the sample to 288 participants. In order to maintain the breadth of the dataset (in terms of age and gender identity), 25 binary-trans participants, 25 non-binary participants and 24 gender-questioning participants were randomly selected (using a random number generator) with 5 from each year of age (i.e. 5 binary-trans participants aged 13, 5 binary-trans participants aged 14 etc).[41]

Participants' demographic data

Table 1 details the prevalence of the gender identities within the sample. Table 2 presents other demographic data of participants within the three groups, including their sexual orientation, ethnicity, whether or not they were experiencing a disability and whether or not they were eligible for free school meals. Table 3 contains the data on the location and type of school participants attended.

[41] One subgroup (gender-questioning participants, aged 14) was comprised of 4 participants and so the final dataset for qualitative analysis consisted of responses from 74 participants.

Table 1: Participants' gender identities

	Binary-trans (n=25)		Non-binary (n=25)		Gender-Questioning (n=24)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Gender identity						
Trans boy	20	80				
Trans girl	5	20				
Genderfluid			3	12		
Non-binary			8	32		
Agender			4	16		
Other term[1]			10	40		
Gender-questioning girl					12	50
Gender-questioning boy					3	13
Questioning					2	8
Other term[2?]					7	29

[1] Other terms used by only one participant were: Genderqueer/non-binary, magiboy, queer, demigender/demigirl, non-binary transmasculine, both, egogender, genderqueer trans male, nonbinary/genderfluid/agender, gender neutral

[2] Other terms used by only one participant were: questioning previously trans male, non-binary but unsure, non-binary/questioning, unsure, possibly MtF trans, gender confused, gender fluid/questioning

Table 2: Further demographic information for participants

	Binary-trans (n=25)		Non-binary (n=25)		Gender-Questioning (n=24)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Sexual orientation						
Bisexual	7	28	5	20	8	33
Gay or lesbian	4	16	3	12	4	17
Straight/heterosexual	2	8	0	0	0	0
Questioning	2	8	1	4	1	4
Pansexual[1]	3	12	14	56	10	42
Queer	0	0	2	8	1	4
Asexual panromantic	2	8	0	0	0	0
Other[2]	5	20	0	0	0	0
Ethnicity						
White	22	88	22	88	22	92
Multiple ethnicities	2	8	2	8	0	0
Asian/Asian British	1	4	1	4	2	8
Disability						
Yes	1	4	2	8	2	8
No	21	84	19	76	19	79
Don't Know	3	12	4	16	2	8
No answer	0	0	0	0	1	4
Free school meals						
Yes	3	12	4	16	1	4
No	22	88	20	80	22	91
Don't know	0	0	1	4	1	4

[1]Including pansexual/panalterous, pansexual and polyamory, pansexual in varying quantities

[2] Other terms used by only one participant were: asexual, bisexual heteromantic, no label, panromantic, aromantic

Table 3: Participants' school location and type

	Binary-trans (n=25)		Non-binary (n=25)		Gender-Questioning (n=24)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Nation						
England	20	80	21	84	21	88
Scotland	4	16	4	16	1	4
Wales	1	4	0	0	2	8
School or college						
Secondary school	20	80	21	84	17	71
Sixth form college	5	20	3	12	7	29
Don't know	0	0	1	4	0	0
Location						
Urban area/city	13	52	8	32	4	17
Suburban area	7	28	6	24	7	29
Small town/ village/rural	5	20	10	40	8	33
Don't know	0	0	1	4	5	21
*Type of school**						
A faith school	4	16	6	24	3	13
Pupil referral unit	0	0	0	0	1	4
Private/independent	1	4	4	16	2	8
Single sex school	2	8	3	12	2	8
None of the above/not answered	18	64	15	60	16	66

*This question was optional and participants were invited to tick all that apply.

Indication of analysis

A number of approaches to analysis were considered, a process termed *indication* (Flick, 2014), before it was determined that a thematic approach was most appropriate for the dataset. Firstly, qualitative analysis was chosen because, having reviewed the original dataset, it was clear that the open-ended responses in the survey contained rich data that would be best suited to a qualitative approach. Qualitative content analysis (numerically counting the themes/codes within the data set (Mayring, 2000)) is commonly used with survey data, and would have been appropriate given the fixed nature of the questionnaire. However, content analysis has been described as "strongly marked by the ideal of a quantitative methodology...without really reaching the depths of the text" (Flick, 2014, pp. 435–436), and was thus deemed inappropriate. Specifically, while content analysis would potentially have been appropriate to answer questions on social experiences, the aspects relating to the construct of identity would not be answerable through content analysis. Other, more in-depth qualitative methods were also excluded – given that some participants only provided short answers to each question, discourse and narrative approaches were judged unsuitable (Flick, 2014). Therefore, a thematic approach was chosen, incorporating the principles of both thematic coding (Flick, 2014) and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The reasoning for this will be outlined below.

Thematic coding

Thematic coding relies on the assumption that "in different social worlds or groups, differing views can be found" (Flick, 2014, p. 423), and was thus considered appropriate for this study's exploration of potential similarities and differences between the experiences and identities of binary-trans, non-binary and gender-questioning youth. However, the analysis did not follow the exact stages of thematic coding, which involve an in-depth case analysis of the first case in order to develop a thematic structure, and a short summary made for each case (Flick, 2014). Whilst this may be suitable for interviews, the questionnaire already had a fixed structure and there were many participants, so such an approach would be both unnecessary and inefficient. Therefore, although the principles and assumptions of thematic coding proved useful in analysing the young people's experiences separately, the steps within the thematic coding process were not strictly followed. Instead, coding within the groups (per Flick's (2014) recommendation) was done in accordance with the principles of thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). The use of these two approaches together arguably amounts to a qualitative comparative approach (Guest et al., 2014), which aims to establish whether themes are present in all groups under study, and whether there are differences in theme expression between groups.

Reflexive thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a process which "minimally organises and describes [the] dataset in rich detail" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 6), where themes represent patterns across the dataset. Thematic analysis is flexible and there are a number of options to consider. Thematic analysis can be inductive (data-driven) or deductive (theory-driven); themes can be identified at a semantic or latent level; analysis can aim to richly describe the whole dataset or focus in detail on one particular aspect. The way in which decisions relating to these options were made will be reflected on as the analytic process is described, in order to highlight the ongoing reflexive dialogue of the analytic process.

Since their seminal paper on thematic analysis in 2006, Braun and Clarke have further expanded on thematic analysis - thematic analysis can be seen as an 'umbrella' of approaches rather than a single approach, with three main schools of TA defined within: coding reliability, codebook, and reflexive (Braun & Clarke, 2019a, 2019b). Coding reliability and codebook TA revolve around a structured codebook, created either prior to any analysis or after a degree of initial data familiarisation (Braun et al., 2019). This differs extensively from reflexive TA: coding is open-ended and flexible, becoming more interpretative as the researcher gains a more intimate understanding of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019b). Importantly, reflexive thematic analysis does not have a primary aim of accurately summarising the data or eradicating researcher subjectivity (Braun et al., 2019). Instead, those using reflexive TA recognise that all analysis is an interpretation of the data, influenced by the researcher's positionality and theoretical background.

Analytic process

Once the 74 participants were randomly selected, all responses to the open-ended questions of the larger survey were identified and imported into Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software package. Participants' responses were saved as three separate Atlas.ti 'projects', according to group (binary-trans, non-binary or gender-questioning), to facilitate distinct analyses. Braun and Clarke's (2006) procedure was then followed. Firstly, the data were read and re-read for familiarisation (Phase 1). Initial, open coding was then undertaken, and all aspects of the data were coded (Phase 2).[42] This included codes that did not directly answer the research questions relating to school experiences (e.g. 'GP lacked knowledge about trans issues'). A list of initial codes was then generated: 241 codes in the trans dataset, 260 codes in the non-binary dataset, and 211 codes in the gender-questioning dataset. The three lists of codes were examined

[42] Practically, Friese, Soratto and Pires' (2018) guidance on using Atlas.ti for thematic analysis was followed.

together, and small discrepancies, such as in code wording across datasets, were edited. This resulted in 160 codes in the binary-trans dataset (see Appendix 2), 176 in the non-binary data-set (Appendix 3) and 174 in the gender-questioning dataset (Appendix 4). The code lists were then condensed, and any codes that did not relate to the research questions, and to school specifically, were removed.[43] The codes were then organised into 17 groups or potential themes/subthemes (Phase 3), based on similarities in concept and/or content. In practice, this involved highlighting similar codes and applying labels that described patterns within the data. This process of analysis was done separately within each data-set, and therefore these code groups differed slightly between the datasets – for instance, the binary-trans dataset included the code group 'otherness', whereas the other datasets did not. The emerging themes (i.e. broader categories built from the codes) were constantly compared between the three data-sets, and aspects of the data that seemed to be unique to one group were noted. Where themes did seem to be similar in each data-set, notes were made about whether the expression of the theme was different. Although there were a number of differences between the theme expression within each group, the patterns and themes were similar and therefore it made sense to represent the similar patterns in the data-sets with the same themes. The datasets were re-read and the themes reviewed, and the codes altogether reflected on in light of the theoretical frameworks (Phase 4), thus representing both an inductive and deductive approach to analysis. Data were initially explored without a coding frame or explicit analytic preconceptions, but analytic preconceptions would nevertheless have influenced the coding process (Braun et al., 2019). For instance, after the initial code groups had been constructed, an initial thematic map was drawn and the relevant theoretical frameworks were considered. Thematic maps were produced so as to understand and conceptualise the links and relationships between the themes. Numerous iterations of the thematic maps were drawn up, as the themes and their relationships became more nuanced, the themes reconceptualised and refined (Phase 5), and the results written up (Phase 6).[44]

Participants' responses have been included in the results section verbatim, except for correcting any spelling/grammatical mistakes[45] and adding clarity, indicated by square brackets. Omissions have been indicated with ellipses. Participants' gender identities have also been included as they described themselves, in order to reflect the complexity and diversity of gender identity within the sample. Some have been changed in format (for example, 'both☺' has been

[43] The full code lists are included in the Appendices (rather than the condensed code lists) for the sake of transparency (see p. 58 for further discussion of transparency).
[44] Phases 5 and 6 happened concurrently, demonstrating that the writing up process should be considered as a stage of analysis in itself, where ideas are refined and developed (Smart, 2010).
[45] The ethical implications of 'tidying up' participants' responses are explored in depth in Chapter 3 in relation to interview data. Minimal changes were made to participants' responses here, primarily spelling mistakes.

changed to 'both gender person'). If participants did not use their own term to describe their gender (see 'categorisation process' above, p. 48), their identities have tentatively assigned based on their answers – for example, if they indicated "gender-questioning" to being trans, and gave their gender as "female" they have been described as a gender-questioning girl.

Quality of qualitative research

Criteria such as reliability and validity are commonly used to evaluate the rigour of quantitative research, and indeed, quantitative researchers try to ensure a lack of bias and produce reliable results, ultimately aiming to be 'objective' (Madill et al., 2000). The same criteria cannot be used for qualitative research, particularly when considering that quantitative research may be grounded in positivist epistemology (Frost, 2014). Moreover, qualitative research differs from quantitative research in that a lack of bias is assumed to be neither possible nor desirable. For instance, this thesis' aim of conducting social justice research has been made explicit at the outset (Hammack, 2018). At all stages of data collection and analysis, subjectivity is prevalent, from deciding the topic of study and its theoretical underpinnings, to deeming which themes are most interesting or relevant, and presenting the data.[46] In thematic analysis specifically, this is made clear by Braun and Clarke's (2006) suggestion that the researcher should not be seen as simply 'giving voice' to participants, or 'discovering' themes. Instead, as Braun et al. (2019, p. 844) have noted, "themes are built, moulded, and given meaning at the intersection of data, researcher experience and subjectivity, and research question(s)". Although qualitative research is therefore subjective, this does not mean to suggest that it is either unnecessary or impossible to assess the rigour of qualitative research. In particular, it is important to ask how far researchers' constructions are empirically grounded within participants' experiences. Without this 'quality control', Flick (2014) notes that qualitative research may amount to little more than 'selective plausibilisation', which refers to the selection of quotations that support the researcher's preconceptions only.

In order to ensure that qualitative research meets the same standard of rigour as quantitative research, Gaskell and Bauer (2000) suggest a number of markers of confidence and relevance to be considered. Confidence markers allow the reader to be confident that "the results of the research represent 'reality' and are more than the product of the vivid imagination of the researcher" (Gaskell & Bauer, 2000, p. 344). Relevance markers allow the reader to scrutinise the utility and importance of the research, in both its theoretical and empirical contributions. The present study met both confidence and relevance markers, which will now be described and explored.

[46] Within quantitative research, the researcher also plays a highly active role, but this has much less been explored (L. Ryan & Golden, 2006).

The key confidence markers outlined by Gaskell and Bauer (2000) are transparency and procedural clarity, triangulation and reflexivity. At all times, the research aimed to be transparent and the study's steps made clear: the present chapter has outlined the study's methodology in detail, and the Appendices detail its further intricacies (e.g. the codes created). Notably, the Appendices include both codes that were relevant to the RQs and codes that were irrelevant (relating to experiences at home, for instance) so as to provide as full a picture of the dataset as possible. This documentation forms part of the study's audit trail, a method by which decisions and activities are clearly documented as a way of ensuring transparency (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Flick, 2014). As part of this method, a systematic approach to note-taking was followed and copies of initial thematic maps retained.

Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods that converge on the same topic, in order to add confidence to the findings. It has been suggested that there are four types of triangulation: triangulation of methods, investigators, theories and data sources (N. Carter et al., 2014; Creswell & Miller, 2000). This study utilised theoretical triangulation, in that a number of different theoretical frameworks were considered and employed, including both sociological and social psychological theories. Some theories are explored in depth, and others briefly referred to in relation to their relevance to the dataset. As the discussion of the findings makes clear, the use of multiple theories and consideration of multiple perspectives was especially valuable.

Unsurprisingly, reflexivity is key within reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019a) and is also an important component of social justice research (see Hammack, 2018). Therefore, all stages of the study were reflected on in depth. Given that this study utilised secondary dataset analysis, the pros and cons of the dataset have been considered extensively above (see p. 46). Throughout the process of analysis, peer debriefing was conducted, and this offered a space to reflect on the study itself and on each decision as it was made: once the data had been initially coded, approximately 9 meetings were held over the course of 6 months with a researcher experienced in qualitative methodologies, and notes from these meetings have been retained. Additionally, a meeting was held with representatives from Stonewall, and this helped to refine the aims of the project. One key benefit of partnering with an LGBTQ+ organisation is that it enabled the study to be as effective as possible in its commitment to social justice. For instance, Stonewall representatives said that having empirical evidence specifically about non-binary adolescents' school experiences would be beneficial to them, and therefore that the researcher's

proposal to analyse the experiences of binary-trans, non-binary and gender-questioning adolescents separately was useful.[47]

Markers of relevance include surprise value and communicative validation. Surprise value, equivalent to hypothesis testing in quantitative research, is important to ensure that research does not simply support preconceived assumptions about the research questions (Gaskell & Bauer, 2000). Therefore, disconfirming evidence, if it does not outweigh the confirming evidence, can increase confidence in the findings. Participants' experiences did vary considerably across the dataset, and these differences have been explored throughout the results section, rather than being minimised.

Communicative validation refers to asking participants for their perspectives on the study's findings, and it has been noted that this is a key way to ensure that findings reflect participants' understandings (Creswell & Miller, 2000). However, given the specificities of the dataset, communicative validation was not possible: the data had already been collected, and participants were not identifiable from it. It is perhaps worth noting that when the survey was created, its questions were piloted to check for both functionality and the wording of the questions. One change included using the term 'trans' instead of 'transgender', demonstrating the usefulness of asking for input from potential participants in research on this topic. Although communicative validation from participants was not possible, tentative findings from this study were presented at an LGBT Psychology conference, and a paper published from the study (Bower-Brown et al., 2021). Both the conference and journal article allowed for feedback from other researchers on the study's findings, thus serving as both a marker of confidence and of relevance. Additionally, the study's findings were shared with the Education Team at Stonewall, who gave positive feedback on the study's findings, suggesting that the findings echoed what they had heard from working with young people themselves, adding further confidence to the findings.

Gaskell and Bauer (2000) note that there are two markers that ensure both confidence and relevance, and these are corpus construction and thick description. Corpus construction refers to the systematic selection of participants' data (Bauer & Aarts, 2000), and the way in which participants were selected from the wider dataset has been outlined in detail above. Although the size of the sample within qualitative research is not necessarily significant (Nathan et al., 2019), given that the amount of detail participants gave varied considerably, the overall sample size facilitated both the breadth and depth of analyses. Thick description is a marker of

[47] This is particularly important when considering the third principle of social justice research, 'alliance with the subordinate' (see p. 22), which suggests that research should achieve outcomes which benefit the marginalised group under study.

confidence and relevance, and it refers to the inclusion of sufficient detail from participants' data, so as to ensure that the researcher's interpretation of the data is justified. Participants' responses were included as they were written, with minimal changes made to their responses. A mixture of both lengthy and short quotations has been used in order to provide a sufficient level of detail, while also allowing for interpretation of the findings.

It is therefore clear that the study met many of Gaskell and Bauer's (2000) quality criteria, and this suggests that its findings are likely to be relevant, and can be interpreted with confidence. At the same time, whether a set list of quality criteria is useful – or reductive – has been questioned (Flick, 2014; Frost, 2014). For the purposes of interpreting the findings of this study, then, it is important to keep the key research *strategies* in mind, and in particular, those of transparency and reflexivity.

2.3: Results

Through thematic analysis of the data, 5 themes and 10 subthemes were found. These themes and subthemes are presented in the table (Table 4) below.

Table 4: Themes and subthemes identified within the dataset

Theme	**Subtheme**
Categories and constraints	Normativities Space constraints
Social feedback	Actual/anticipated feedback Power
Disclosure negotiation	Sexuality vs gender identity Lack of control
Cognitive construction	Authenticity Denial
Proactive protection	LGBTQ+ community Support from others

All themes and subthemes were reflected upon in relation to the theoretical constructs of identity and the self (Blumer, 1962; Burke, 2000; Mead, 1934; Sheldon Stryker, 2008). This highlighted two key processes found to be relevant to the ways in which participants negotiated their identities in relation to their social experiences: identity threats and identity work. The way in which these processes relate to the themes and subthemes is depicted in Figure 2 below. In short, 'identity threats' is composed of the themes 'categories and constraints' and 'social feedback' and 'identity work' is made up of the themes 'disclosure negotiation', 'cognitive construction', and 'proactive protection'. These two key processes of identity threat and identity work will now be explored, as will their relationship to the theoretical constructs of identity and the self. Following this, each theme and subtheme will be discussed in depth using illustrative quotations from participants' survey responses.

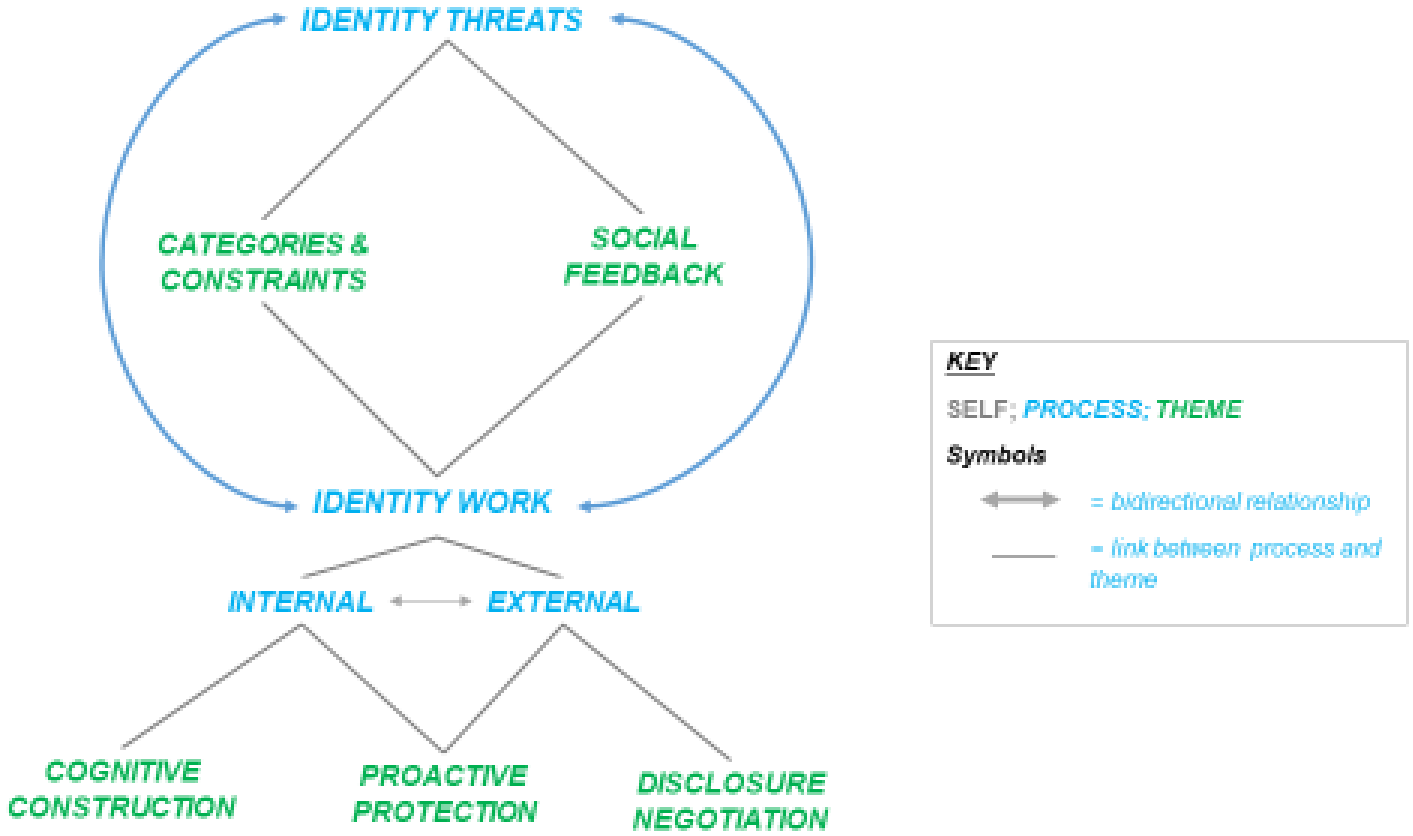


Figure 2: Thematic map depicting the interrelated themes identified in the survey responses of gender-diverse adolescents

Processes: identity threats and identity work

Identity threats, building upon and extending Petriglieri's (2011) definition, are defined here as the experiences *and norms* appraised as indicating potential harm to the value, meanings, or enactment of an identity; in other words, anything in the environment (both immediate and wider social spheres) that participants perceived as potentially harmful to their identities.[48] The notion of identity threats are here understood to include societal norms which may be threatening (Goffman, 1963) and negative reflected appraisals from social others (Burke, 2000). Identity work is defined here based on a number of concepts, including identity work, face work and stigma management (Goffman, 1967; Siegel et al., 1998; D A Snow & Anderson, 1987). Identity work can be defined as the range of activities that individuals engage in to develop, present and sustain identities that are congruent with the self that they themselves perceive and experience as true.[49] These two processes underpin the overarching theme of *undertaking identity work in the context of identity threats.*

With respect to the research questions, the processes of identity threats and identity work help to answer RQ 1. 'Identity threats' capture participants' school experiences, and identity work captures the ways in which they form and sustain identities within the context of such threat. With respect to RQ2, the themes and subthemes were found to be relevant to the three groups in varying degrees of magnitude and meaning. Where present, such differences are expanded upon below.

With respect to the processes of identity threats and identity work, the analysis highlighted the relevance of distinguishing between different aspects of the self: the self as it is perceived by the self (A), the self as presented to social others (B) and the self as it is perceived by social others (C) (see Figure 3).

[48] Petrigilieri (2011) refers to identity threat, but this thesis refers to identity threats in plural, to highlight that threat was experienced in many ways and many different forms.

[49] Snow & Anderson's (1987) definition was most heavily relied upon to interpret these findings. However, it is worth noting that their definition includes the notion of personal identity, whereas this thesis takes the symbolic interactionist perspective that all identities are social (Jenkins, 2004; Mead, 1934).

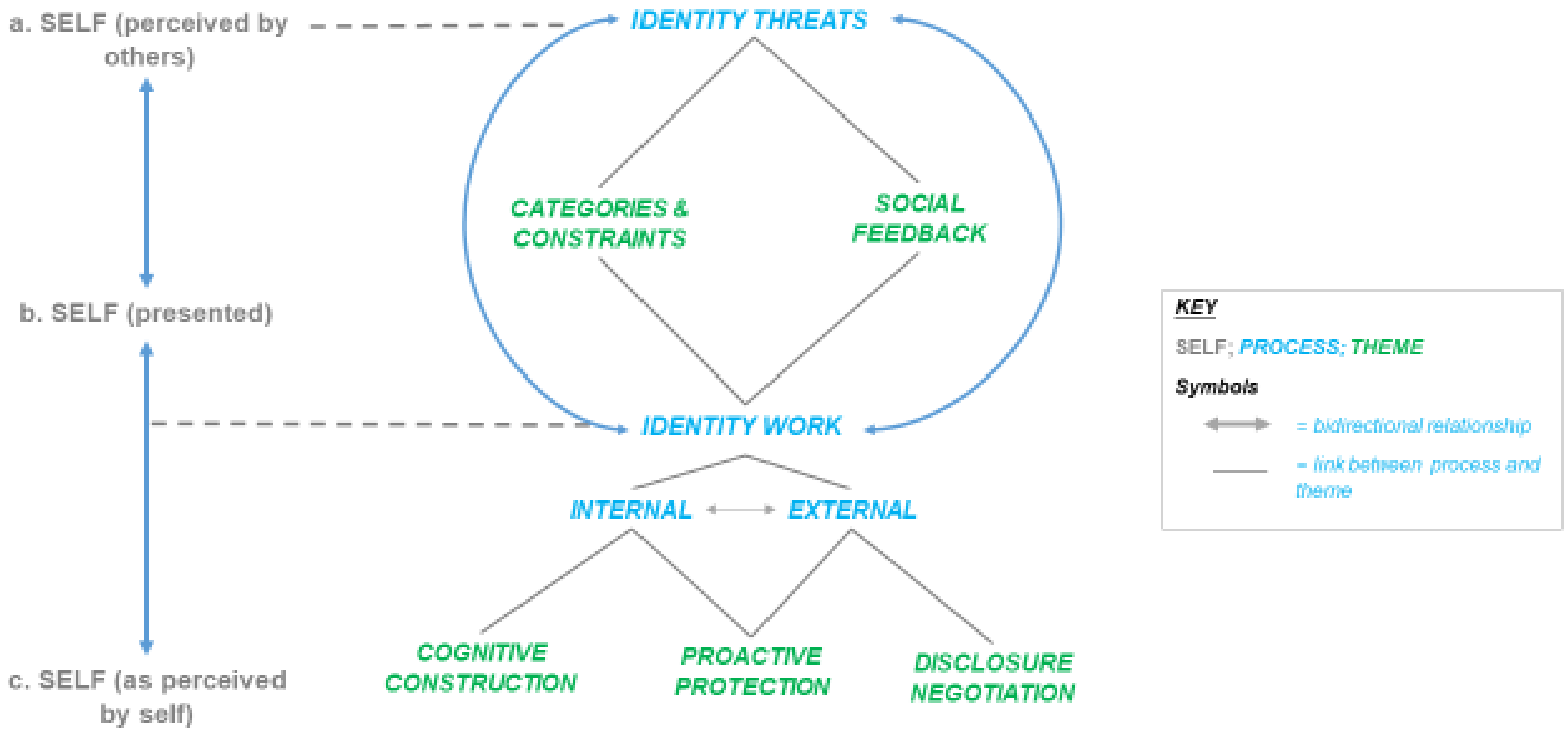


Figure 3: Thematic map (as in Figure 2) including distinction between aspects of the self

These distinctions reflect participants' responses in multiple ways. The distinction between (A) and (B) reflects the finding that many participants expressed feeling as though the way they presented themselves was incongruent with their own sense of identity, due to the potential or actual threats to their identity within the social environment. Similarly, the distinction between (B) and (C) captures the finding that many participants described an incongruence between how they presented themselves and how they were perceived by others. Identity threats are processes that occur when the presented self (B) is perceived (C), and correspondingly behaved towards, in such a way that is threatening to the individual's self-perception (A). This is depicted in Figure 3 by the dotted line between the identity threat and the perceived self (C), and the bidirectional arrows between A, B and C.

Identity work is a process that aims at congruence between the self that is perceived by the individual (A) and the self that is presented (B), within contextual constraints posed by actual or anticipated threats to identity. This is depicted in Figure 3 by the dotted line from identity work to the relationship between the personal (A) and presented (B) selves. As *identity work in the context of identity threats* is a constant, non-linear process, identity threats and identity work have been linked via bidirectional, cyclical arrows. It is recognised that these processes, themes and subthemes are interlinked in complex ways, and this complexity resists simple visual depiction. This complexity will therefore be expanded upon below. In brief, participants used identity work to manage identity threats in the environment, thus protecting their sense of self.

The process of identity work has been divided into internal and external identity work – it is recognised that this distinction is overly simplistic, and their interconnectedness is depicted by the bidirectional arrow on the map. However, the distinction has been included in an attempt to overcome the lack of clarity with regards to previous definitions of identity work. Internal identity work refers to the ways in which participants think about, synthesise and maintain their self-identity (C) within the context of identity threats. External identity work refers to the practices that participants undertook in specific interactions to reduce incongruence between their selves, and the ways in which this was constrained.

The themes and subthemes that form the basis of the remaining discussion in this chapter should be understood and read in relation to these processes, and the self (A, B, C) dynamics as described. Some these are broadly latent (e.g. categories and constraints) and some semantic (e.g. social feedback), and within each theme both semantic and latent aspects of the data are discussed.

Themes and subthemes

Identity threat

As seen in Figures 2 and 3, two themes are conceptually situated within the process of identity threats: (i) categories and constraints and (ii) social feedback.

Categories and constraints

The theme categories and constraints refers to the way in which participants described feeling that strict categories in the environment were related to normativities, and how these were enacted in the school environment, both within physical and metaphorical spaces. This theme includes the subthemes of 'normativities' and 'space constraints'.

Normativities

Participants across the dataset noted a number of normativities present in the wider social sphere. Participants in all three groups (binary-trans, non-binary and gender-questioning adolescents) described the role that cisheteronormative assumptions played in the school curriculum; in language within and beyond the classroom; and in school policy. One gender-questioning participant stated that assemblies focussed on a number of relationship issues – yet these "focussed entirely on heterosexual relationships with no mention of anything else" (gender-questioning girl, aged 17):

> I have never been taught in school about LGBT issues until anti-bullying week, where the focus was apparently LGBT but nothing was done except one assembly that instead focused on 'tolerance' as a whole and didn't even mention LGBT issues. (unsure person, aged 16)

Some participants described that discriminatory language was widely used within their school:

> I think people don't challenge homo/bi/transphobic language in school because maybe they feel like they have to do what everyone else is doing and not argue. (trans boy, aged 14)

In previous work, language has been theorised as an important tool of 'discursive aggression' (shuster, 2017) by which cis/heteronormativities are reified and maintained. In the present study, participants described being affected by both cis and heteronormativities, a finding that is perhaps not surprising given the fact that the vast majority did not identify as straight (see Table 2, p. 53: "I wish I could talk about girls in the media I find attractive like my brother can – and he's only 7!" (queer person, aged 14). However, given that the concepts of cisnormativity and heteronormativity are intertwined such that one reinforces and naturalises the ideals of the other (Rich, 1980; Westbrook & Schilt, 2014), the dual presence of cis/heteronormativities

described by participants (irrespective of their sexual orientation) is perhaps to be expected. In particular, social others were described as devaluing participants on the basis of sexuality and gender identity, an experience that participants explained as perhaps being due to schools' inclusion of non-normative genders and sexualities under the 'LGBTQ+' umbrella:

> The headteacher at the school I attended was openly against anything LGBT-related, as was the Head of Sixth Form. (gender-questioning girl, aged 17)

Participants in all three groups stated that, if LGBTQ+ issues were mentioned in their school, education was nevertheless mostly limited to a focus on "mild homophobia" (trans boy, aged 14): "there was an epidemic of homophobic slurs that got ironed out pretty fast but they never did anything against transphobia" (trans girl, aged 16).

Normativities within the wider social sphere were also described as impacting participants' experiences:

> Coming out is worse when the people you're telling don't understand it, and only know stuff from the media. (both gender person, age 16)

> The only reason I went through this stage of my life [of self-harm] is because the pressure of fitting in was too much. I stuck out like a sore thumb and I was afraid I wasn't "normal"…The media also doesn't help in the way that it pressures young people to dress a certain way, look a certain way, be a certain way. It's horrible, it really is. (non-binary person, aged 14)

Alongside this broader lack of understanding about gender diversity, participants reported pressure to exist within the "two and only two" gender binary (Lucal, 1999, p. 781). Non-binary participants in particular expressed feeling that there was a lack of inclusion of genders that deviate from this norm. For example, one non-binary young person described how they wanted to join the army but were "worried as a non binary person if I fit into the strict binaries they have" (agender person, aged 14). In responding to a specific question about their hopes for the future, one participant described hoping:

> That non-binary genders will be recognised by everyone and we won't get people talking about "two genders", that transgender people feel a lot more included and feel safe as the person they really are, just in general more acceptance for people who aren't "normal". (gender fluid/questioning person, aged 14)

This participant's conceptualisation of 'normal' demonstrates the way in which gender governs intelligibility, in other words, it demonstrates that those who conform to gender norms and cisnormative assumptions are perceived as being a 'valid' person, thus excluding those who do

not conform (Butler, 2004). Binary-trans participants did not mention the restrictive nature of the gender binary, but rather expressed facing other, related difficulties, for instance in relation to their schools' misinterpretations of the law:

> [The school] would only let me use my preferred name if I got it legally changed to that. (trans boy, aged 17)

> I really want to have PE with the other boys, but I'm stuck with the girls because it's the law. (trans boy, aged 14)

Here, participants' experiences suggest that schools may allow inclusion of binary-trans individuals, but only when backed up by 'legal' determinants of gender, despite there being no such requirements in UK law and it not being possible for individuals under 18 to obtain a GRC.[50] Importantly, non-binary identities are not legally recognised within the UK at all, meaning that such 'legal' means could not be used by many of the participants in this study to ensure respect of their gender identity at school. These experiences also suggest transnormativity, meaning the way in which gender-diverse individuals are held accountable to a binary, medical model of transness (Johnson 2016), within the school environment.

Space constraints

Sex-segregated spaces were mentioned in the responses of young people in all three groups within the study, but the way in which they impacted participants was found to vary between the three groups. Within sex-segregated spaces, binary-trans participants spoke about the power of language to regulate spaces:

> As it's a same-sex school, we get referred to as "ladies" and "girls" all the time. I feel as though the school should accept that some students are trans whether they decide to come out or not and recommend that teachers use gender-neutral terms to be more trans-inclusive. (trans boy, aged 14)

> My teacher has been very accommodating though and asked if I wanted her to say 'kids' rather than 'girls' when talking to the class and stuff, I said it was okay for her to say girls because I knew if she messed up it would probably just draw more attention to the subject. (trans boy, aged 14)

[50] The UK Equality Act 2010 states that all TNB students should be protected from discrimination at school (Equality Act, 2010; Renz, 2020). However, a recent House of Commons briefing paper states that "decisions on uniform, provisions for shared sanitary and changing facilities and mixed sport are primarily made by schools themselves" (Long & Loft, 2020, p. 3). This lack of a national policy demonstrates why students at different schools may have vastly different experiences.

These experiences demonstrate the difficulty experienced by some participants of choosing between feeling excluded by gendered language and feeling othered by gender-neutral language, reflecting the importance of teachers using gender-neutral language sensitively and in collective, rather than individual, responses to students. In terms of toilets/changing rooms, binary-trans young people often described that they were able to use alternative facilities, but some experienced othering through these spaces:

> They have provided me the comfort with using facilities that helps me be comfortable…I have been allowed to leave to use the toilets in lessons so I don't get into any mess with using the male toilets. I also use the accessible toilet to get changed in at school for P.E to not assign me to a gender or upset me or others around. (trans boy, aged 14)

> I can use the female staff changing room which makes me kind of uncomfortable because people stare at me when I go in or out. (trans boy, aged 14)

Therefore, despite participants experiencing different levels of comfort with the facilities provided, it is clear that there were no specific gender-neutral facilities, and the concern about not upsetting "others around" arguably demonstrates prioritisation of the needs of cis students over gender-diverse students. These quotations rather suggest that students may be accommodated using the limited, and inappropriate, facilities that schools already have, echoing previous findings (Davy & Cordoba, 2019; Weinhardt et al., 2017). In particular, the use of accessible toilets was found to be common ("my school disallowed me from using male bathrooms and said I had to use disabled" (trans boy, aged 17)), and was generally disliked ("I don't like having to use the gender neutral disabled toilet, I'm not disabled" (trans boy, aged 15). Findings thus echo previous suggestions that toilet use is 'policed' by schools (Slater et al., 2018; Westbrook & Schilt, 2014), reflecting a lack of autonomy for gender-diverse youth.

Non-binary participants expressed a desire for gender-neutral spaces, which were often not provided ("it would really help if we had unisex bathrooms" (non-binary person, aged 15)) and also reported feeling policed by other students for using gendered facilities ("told I'm using the wrong bathroom" (non-binary person, aged 15). As another non-binary participant, anticipating stigma, explained:

> I would like there to be gender neutral toilets/changing rooms…but if that did happen I feel like I would get a lot of hate and may not be confident enough to use it. It would probably get vandalised or people would use it as a joke as well. (genderqueer/non-binary person, aged 13)

Conversely, non-binary participants who were comfortable using binary facilities described how their school policy contradicted their wishes: “they wanted me to find a disabled toilet (only one available and it’s all the way in the sixth form that wasn’t always available) to get changed in despite me saying I was fine in the female changing room” (non-binary person, aged 15). These experiences suggest a policing of non-binary students’ gender by staff and students, demonstrating the existence of ‘gender panics’ (Westbrook & Schilt, 2014) within highly gendered spaces. Despite the majority of non-binary participants feeling uncomfortable with binary facilities (“my school is very binary and I feel I can't come out at school as they wouldn't know what to do with me” (agender person, aged 14)), one non-binary participant described feeling that ‘not fitting in’ to the binary gave them an advantage in gendered spaces:

> Since my gender isn't male or female, I personally am happy using the toilets that match up with my sex and wearing the uniform that matches my sex. (egogender person, aged 16)

This demonstrates heterogeneity within the ‘non-binary’ group and points to the importance of including such diversity within research. Nevertheless, most binary-trans and non-binary students described experiences that amounted to them being policed in their bathroom/changing room use by staff and students, and being generally inappropriately accommodated.

Gender-questioning young people stated that they struggled with gendered spaces, which they described as being partly as a result of their own uncertainty about which facilities they should use:

> I used to have a running streak of weeks I would cry after PE because I was stuck in the girls changing rooms and be[ing] with the girls, but it is probably better with the girls than with the boys. (gender fluid/questioning person, aged 14)

This could be interpreted as reflective of a lack of metaphorical and physical space for gender uncertainty in the social environment, something that gender-questioning participants described as particularly restrictive:

> I find it impossible to experiment with my gender identity (dressing and acting like a girl, using a female name etc.) without coming out. (possible MtF trans, aged 17)

> In year 7 I was bullied for having short hair in a Catholic school, I was questioning my gender and sexuality and was presenting masculine. (non-binary/questioning person, aged 16)

These quotations highlight the relationship between participants' perceived lack of metaphorical space and pervasive, restrictive categories of gender and associated normativities (Travers, 2018). Gender-questioning participants' experiences were therefore found to be dissimilar to binary-trans and non-binary participants in that their own uncertainty made engaging with binary spaces particularly difficult, a finding that is unique to this study.

Social feedback

The theme 'social feedback' captures the reactions that participants received towards their identity from others in the social environment. This theme includes the subthemes of 'actual/anticipated feedback' and 'power', referring respectively to the importance of both real and imagined feedback, and the differing forms of power that social others held.

Actual/anticipated

All participants described experiencing feedback about their identity, whether actual or anticipated. Such experiences were described as threatening by participants, and although anticipated feedback was imagined by participants, it was real in its effects. Across the dataset, participants reported a lack of societal understandings about gender diversity, and described receiving negative reactions as a result. Binary-trans participants explained that this lack of understanding ("no one understands what being transgender is so it make me feel terrible when people make jokes" (trans boy, aged 13)) took the form of bullying:

> When I came out as trans online but not in school people would throw comments and looks and ask me invasive questions about my name change. Since I've come out in school this has decreased however some people say stuff like ' you can't be a boy you haven't got the right genitals' or call me the wrong name deliberately. (trans boy, aged 13)

> A girl in my primary school bullied me verbally and psychologically for 6 years. She tried to tell me how to be a better girl even though I am a trans boy. People on my bus took pictures and videos of me and put them on social media without my permission. They also called me names and sent abusive texts to me. This happened for 3 - 6 months. (trans boy, aged 13)

Due to this bullying, binary-trans participants described emotions ranging from annoyance ("sometimes it annoys me" (trans boy, aged 13)) to anxiety ("because of this bullying I now have a phobia of having videos or pictures taken" (trans boy, aged 13)). Bullying also affected participants' behaviour, and for one participant led to changing school for the last two years of compulsory education: "It's the reason I chose to go to a college instead of staying on for sixth

form at my current school" (trans girl, aged 16), echoing the findings of previous research (Travers, 2018).

Non-binary young people also reported experiencing a range of social feedback about their identity, including inappropriate comments ("hi heshe", "are you a girl or a boy?" "tranny" (nonbinary person, aged 14)) and being ridiculed:

> Many people know that I do not identify with the gender I am assigned, and that I use a preferred name, and many students use this as a way to insult and make fun of me. I feel uncomfortable expressing my gender and identity at school for fear of being ridiculed for dressing or looking a certain way that makes me happy. (non-binary person, aged 16)

One participant explained that, "In my last school I had to be kept in isolation due to the amount of bullying and anxiety I was dealing with" (non-binary person, aged 15). Using isolation (typically a form of punishment at school) on this occasion arguably indicates that schools may reinforce the notion that gender-diverse individuals themselves are 'the problem' (see also Travers, 2018).

Gender-questioning participants also described receiving negative feedback from other students:

> I am now being bullied not as severely by a group of girls who make comments about my body and try to out me in several lessons but I have too much anxiety around telling anyone about my experience. (gender-questioning girl, aged 15)

Such findings demonstrate that participants who are not 'out' in the school environment may experience threat from others to out them (see also the discussion of the subtheme 'lack of control', on p. 76). Experiences of bullying seemed to be particularly impactful for non-binary participants ("Scared. That's the best way I can describe it. I'm scared of being abused for who I am" (demigender/demigirl, aged 14)) and gender-questioning participants ("it makes you feel like you want to dig a hole into the ground and stay there for the rest of your life" (gender-questioning girl, aged 14)), suggesting that the challenges of having an identity that is not legally recognised, or questioning an identity in an environment that relies on gender stability, are especially marked. Indeed, gender-questioning participants noted that "some people think it's a phase" (gender-questioning girl, aged 13) or "in their eyes, you're either cis, trans or intersex" (gender questioning person, aged 15). This finding suggests that whilst there may be a degree of understanding of binary-trans identities, albeit limited, within the school context, the same cannot be said about non-binary or gender-questioning participants (Darwin, 2017; Johnson,

2015). Relatedly, transnormative assumptions about transness as a stable, medical transition from one gender to its 'opposite' were described by some participants to be pervasive:

> I did one time tell a close friend about me questioning my gender…who told a friend…and she confronted me about it and assumed I 'wanted to have a dick'. (gender questioning person, aged 17)

Power

The subtheme of (lack of) power was found to be important to binary-trans, non-binary and gender-questioning participants. Different social others (peers and teachers) were described as having different forms of power or capital, which affected how threatening their feedback or lack of understanding seemed to be to participants. Peers who threatened participants' identities were seen as having social status, and therefore social power and:

> I used my anonymous twitter account to talk about being trans, as it was causing me a lot of distress and needed an outlet - somehow someone from school found it and spread rumours, after that people always commented on my small boobs, short hair, lack of makeup, until it got so bad I hated my body, the uniform I had to wear. (both gender person, aged 16)

A number of participants described their teachers as being uniquely powerful, insofar as they could ameliorate or worsen situations in which participants were threatened by peers at school, again echoing the findings of previous research (Travers, 2018). A minority of participants suggested that teachers were "helpful with dealing with other students who misgender me" (trans boy, aged 17). However, most participants described finding teachers unhelpful: "I have never seen a teacher deal with anti-LGBT remarks" (trans boy, aged 13). Participants also described varying levels of acceptance and understanding amongst staff ("not all teachers wear the LGBT badge they have been given by the school" (gender-questioning girl, aged 15)) suggesting a need for compulsory teacher training on this matter:

> There is a massive lack of understanding about LGBT+ issues among teachers. Although some teachers do understand the basics, with the odd couple knowing about it in a deeper sense, most teachers don't understand what it is which is just another hurdle to be faced if you decide to come out to the school. (trans boy, aged 14)

Moreover, some teachers were described as engaging in bullying behaviour themselves:

> Some staff are okay with me being trans but a minority say insults and use the wrong pronoun on purpose. When I complain about being insulted by staff to other teachers they say that everyone's entitled to their own opinions. (trans boy, aged 14)

> Sometimes teachers actually laugh at the comments or don't do anything which is really upsetting and makes me anxious as someone who doesn't identify as their assigned gender. (non-binary but unsure person, aged 16)

Teachers' participation in bullying arguably legitimises these behaviours among other students. Unsurprisingly, teachers' negative feedback was experienced as particularly challenging for participants:

> Attending a school with an openly homophobic and transphobic senior staff team, that greatly affected my schoolwork and feeling safe at school as I felt if anything did happen to me, nothing would happen. (gender-questioning girl, aged 17)

> I think this is because my school is Catholic but I find it really upsetting (to say the least) that my school chooses to ignore the LGBT community completely. (magiboy, aged 13)

Teachers were also depicted by participants as having authoritative power to affect how they could identify or express their gender at school, thus limiting participants' ability to develop their identities. As one participant described,

> They refused to let me present the way I identify and refused to let me use whatever toilet I would like. I wasn't allowed to change my name OR gender on the register because of "fear of being bullied by other students" despite my protesting. (agender person, aged 16).

Identity work

Three themes characterise the process of identity work: (i) disclosure negotiation, (ii) cognitive construction and (iii) proactive protection.

Disclosure negotiation

The theme of disclosure negotiation refers to "strategic outness" (Orne, 2013): that is, the constant negotiation of disclosure, outness and presentation of identity (Goffman, 1963) described by participants. Concerned with deciding if, when and how to disclose identity, it is therefore part of the external process of identity work. 'Sexuality v gender identity' captures both the differences that participants described between their sexuality and gender identity, and the differences in disclosure negotiation between these two aspects. The subtheme of 'lack of control' both encompasses participants' experiences of choice and control in negotiating disclosure and focusses on the importance of safety as a factor in disclosure decision-making.

The idea of 'coming out' as a constant management of identity differs from traditional stage models of coming out, which have depicted coming out as a linear journey from self-hatred to

self-acceptance (Kaufman & Johnson, 2004). The complex experience of negotiating disclosure was described by binary-trans, non-binary and gender-questioning young people in this study, suggesting that it is a key component of external identity work that many participants undertook within contexts characterised by constraint, irrespective of their identity. Moreover, disclosure negotiation was discussed by participants as "a continual process" (trans girl, aged 17), regardless of whether or not they had disclosed their identity to others. Participants described coming out multiple times, in a number of ways, including online ("I came out as ftm trans on Instagram, by adding my preferred name (trans boy, aged 14)), and in person, using humour ("in the form of some form of joke or sarcastic comment" (gender-questioning girl, aged 17)).

Sexuality vs gender identity

A number of participants who identified as non-heterosexual expressed differences between negotiating disclosure of their sexuality and gender identity:

> I am finding a lot easier to tell my family and classmates that I am gay* in the progressing society but I still get incredibly anxious about telling people or people finding out I'm trans*. (genderqueer/non-binary person, aged 13)

Previous research has found that gender-diverse youth face more discrimination than cis LGBTQ youth (Myers et al., 2020). The findings of this study add to this literature insofar as identity work was described by participants as easier for their sexuality than gender identity:

> Accepting my sexuality and coming out was not a problem, but I had no resources or information on being trans and felt lost for a very long while until I started to research it. Coming out was a very long process and I faced a lot of negativity. I still find it difficult to embrace my identity. (nonbinary transmasculine person, aged 15)

The experience of the young person quoted above is a key example that showcases the relevance of identity control theory, which points to the importance of congruence between appraisals of others and self-meaning (Burke, 1991). Interpreted within this theoretical framework, it may be suggested that the aim the participant described (to "embrace" i.e. have a positive sense of their identity) conflicts with others' negative identity evaluations and that such incongruity may be experienced as distressing.

Lack of control

A number of participants also described feeling a lack of control around the disclosure of their identity, and in particular feeling forced to come out ("Regretted coming out to the school but that was more forced when they heard rumours" (non-binary person, aged 15)) or being outed by others:

> I had people making comments about my gender when I wasn't out. Someone had outed me after I fell out with him and lots of people started being rude about my gender and it was intimidating and pretty scary. (non-binary but unsure person, aged 16)
>
> I slowly came out to people at my new school and it was only close friends. But of course, it spread, as it usually does. (non-binary person, aged 15)

For one participant, being 'outed' was preferable to the stress of having to conceal their identity:

> In some ways, being somewhat 'outed' had a vaguely positive effect as I didn't have to stress about doing it myself and how people would react as anyone who negatively reacted distanced themselves on their own. (gender-questioning girl, aged 17)

This quotation demonstrates that disclosure negotiation at school was experienced by participants as highly stressful, insofar as it involved trying to predict others' responses, and thus viewing the self through the (imagined) eyes of others (Du Bois, 1903). Although some participants thought that it was possible to predict how others would respond to being told about their gender identity ("I have always chosen and considered who to come out to carefully…I have always got a good response from them" (gender-questioning boy, aged 17)), other participants described negotiating disclosure in relation to their safety:

> I know that if I out myself at school I will be forced to change schools because I know I would be relentlessly bullied…I'm afraid that if I make one wrong move I will end up outing myself to everyone. (magiboy, aged 13)

Such findings demonstrate the constancy of and discomfort around disclosure management, as anticipating making "one wrong move" is clearly a highly stressful experience. Participants also suggested that the fear of being unsafe distanced them from the potential benefits of coming out, including mental health support ("I feel like I can't tell anyone that I have self-harmed. If I do, they will want to know the reasons why but I can't risk coming out to anyone" (magiboy, aged 13). Participants explained that their perceptions of disclosure as unsafe were tied to their school experiences ("it would make my life so much easier, but I have been put off by the lack of support and education about LGBT+ issues - it seems like a huge risk" (trans boy, aged 14)). These findings suggest that concealment as a stigma management strategy, which Goffman (1963) described as common, may be associated with potential social cost and stress (I. H. Meyer, 2003; Siegel et al., 1998).

For gender-questioning participants, the process of identity work was not only complicated by actual/anticipated threats to their identity, but also by their own uncertainties about

themselves. Participants suggested that this created difficulties socially, both for themselves and others:

> It's frustrating that no one calls me he or by my preferred name, but at the same time I don't want them to because I don't want others to know, especially as I'm still questioning. (gender-questioning girl, aged 16)

> Some people doubt that I'll go through with fully coming out and others don't use my preferred name in the school environment, for fear of being questioned. (gender-questioning girl, aged 13)

One participant explained, "I want to transition fully into a woman (once I am 100% certain of my gender)" (possible MtF trans, aged 17), suggesting that trans may be seen as a static identity category that, once joined, is not exited, due perhaps to the lack of acceptance of gender fluidity at school. Such findings point to the importance of allowing students to experiment with gender within the school environment. The above-quoted participant's notion of becoming "fully" a woman also demonstrates a prioritisation of a medical transition that was also found in other participants' responses ("I want to be able to fully physically transition, including hormones and surgery" (trans boy, aged 15)). Such findings should be understood in relation to transnormativity and wider societal discourse around "full" woman- or man-hood (Westbrook & Schilt, 2014), thereby highlighting the pervasiveness of the gender binary, and associated normativities (even among gender-diverse groups), and attesting to the significance of considering binary-trans, non-binary and gender-questioning participants' experiences separately.

Some participants described feeling uncertain about whether or not existing social categories fully described their experience:

> When I said that I might be trans, I meant that I'm a bit non-binary, but I don't know whether it's to the extent that I would take action on it. (gender-questioning boy, aged 17)

> It's difficult coming out as trans and as bi as I feel like it's seen as un manly and that I'm not properly trans. (trans boy, aged 17)

These quotations merit discussion of several factors. Firstly, it is noteworthy that participants described feeling that the authenticity of their identities may be questioned if they did not fit into "proper" definitions of trans or non-binary, or were not seen as 'trans enough'. It has been suggested elsewhere that people who do not fit the 'classic' trans narrative find it difficult to access a narrative that describes their experience (Garrison, 2018). The second quotation in

particular suggests a 'gold standard' of gender that binary-trans participants might evaluate themselves against, reflecting transnormativity and similar (if not higher) gender standards than that to which cis people are held. Secondly, even though participants identified as binary-trans this did not necessarily equate to them being sure about the categories most appropriate for them. Such findings thus perhaps point to a limitation of categorising binary-trans, non-binary and gender-questioning participants separately.

It is also worth noting that the lack of control described by participants is absent from Orne's (2011) conceptualisation of "strategic outness". In the context of school, it was not always possible for participants to be strategic: once information had been disclosed to someone, control of that information was lost.[51] Additionally, participants who had not disclosed their identity to others were still recognised in the school environment as LGBTQ+, demonstrating the blurred nature of disclosure, complicating Goffman's (1963) distinction between discredited and discreditable stigmas.

Cognitive construction

The theme cognitive construction captures the ways in which participants framed their experiences conceptually, a strategy understood to minimise the impact of negative experiences on the self. This theme includes the subthemes of 'authenticity' and 'denial'.

Authenticity

The subtheme of authenticity captures the experiences of participants across the dataset, reflecting discrepancies between the personal self, presented self and perceived self (see Figure 3 above, p. 65). Being authentic was described as an important aspect of internal identity work that had the potential to both mitigate and complicate identity threats for participants. In particular, one non-binary participant referred to the concept of an authentic self, but described how being themselves was only possible in certain situations:

> Socially I only make friends with & date other LGBT people who live in other cities…I love getting to be me when I go to Brighton and not caring what anyone else thinks. (queer person, aged 14)

The notion of "being me" implies a lack of authenticity in other situations, and suggests that authenticity potentially protects the 'true' self by construing it as distinct. Relatedly, this participant also expressed that "coming out to me was hardest". The idea of a personal coming out was also present in binary-trans participants' narratives: "coming out to myself was very hard as I still don't really accept myself" (trans boy, aged 13). One participant distinguished

[51] This suggests that this experience is particularly associated with being an adolescent, as rumour spreading is common (especially in early adolescence) (Malamut et al., 2018).

between their own personal world and the outside world: "in the real world I remain very much in the closet…I know that one day I will be ready, and I hope I will, but for now I will remain where I am" (non-binary person, aged 14). Such experiences suggest that double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903) may be potentially protective of the self. However, a lack of authenticity in social interaction was also described as difficult: "Keeping it to yourself is hard" (gender-questioning girl, aged 13). As one participant suggested: "I have to be someone I'm not with the people I should be the most comfortable with" (demigender/demigirl, aged 14).

The subtheme of authenticity somewhat complicates the definition of identity work used within this thesis.[52] Participants here did not try and present identities congruent with their authentic self – instead, recognising the intensity of identity threats within the school environment, participants deliberately kept the authentic self separate from the self presented in interaction. This enabled them to potentially avoid discrimination, but also limited their ability to develop their authentic self in interaction, perhaps suggesting that the nature of identity work for some of the participants in this study was especially complex (the theoretical implications of this will be further explored in the discussion).

Denial

In addition to emphasising the incongruence between the authentic self and self in interaction, some participants denied the existence of identity threats and/or the relevance of their gender identity to their experiences overall. It should be noted that it is highly important to allow space for positive experiences when studying the experiences of gender-diverse youth. It has also been suggested that deficit framing, and maintaining the extant research focus on universally negative outcomes, is a form of pathologisation (Horton, 2020; Neary, 2018). It is therefore important to aim not to undertake damage-centred research, but to understand how youth are negatively affected by oppression (Fine et al., 2018) and how they resist this oppression. Despite the importance of allowing for all experiences to be researched, it is noteworthy that some participants in this study stated that they did not experience identity threat alongside providing responses that described a degree of threat. One interpretation is that their ambivalent narratives might suggest that denial may rather function as a coping strategy, rather than reflect a lack of identity threats. For example, one non-binary participant wrote:

> After coming out to the people around me, I was taunted a lot…It didn't really affect anything as I didn't take it to heart and carried on with my life as normal apart from switching back to my given name. (gender non-binary person, aged 13)

[52] The definition used here was the range of activities that individuals engage in to develop, present and sustain identities that are congruent with the self that they perceive to be 'true' (Mead, 1934; D A Snow & Anderson, 1987)

This demonstrates a denial of the effects of identity threats, and considering that this participant stated elsewhere that "I think your preferred name and pronouns should be used", it seems that although their responses suggest recognition of threat, its impact has been denied. Another participant denied that being trans had affected their life: "I don't feel the need to surround myself with other LGBT to be accepted and comfortable. School is good. Home is good. Being trans hasn't affected my life much at all." (trans boy, aged 15). However, the same participant also noted "Hari Nef is good trans role model…Frank Ocean wearing make-up is also quite good", thereby reflecting a desire to have LGBTQ+ role models. Equally, this participant also stated that they were "too nervous to use the boys' toilets". Again, without wanting to 'interpret into' participants' narratives, such findings potentially suggest that anxieties about difficult social experiences may not always be explicitly articulated as such. Seen in this way, the strategy of denial allowed participants to limit the importance of their gender identity, meaning that the impact of any threats to the self may be significantly reduced (Petriglieri, 2011).

Additionally, some participants attempted to discredit the people who threatened them: "the chavs at school" (queer person, aged 14) or "the rougher kids who tend to be the ones who use [homo/bi/transphobic] language" (trans boy, aged 14). Discrediting thus arguably represents another method of denying the salience of threats to identity, and therefore protecting self-worth. This strategy has been described elsewhere as 'condemning the condemners' (Sykes & Matza, 1957; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Proactive protection

The existing literature on identity work highlights the importance of activities that create a positive group identity, including spending time with others who share that identity or support that identity (Goffman, 1963; D A Snow & Anderson, 1987). Across the dataset, proactive protection was found to be a strategy commonly used by participants, and was described by them as being particularly effective. Strategies of proactive protection included seeking out LGBTQ+ people and allies, creating communities, and engaging in activism. Participants across the dataset were found to have sought out and spend time with 'sympathetic others' (Goffman, 1963) who shared an LGBTQ+ identity:

> I came out to a friend that was bisexual (which seemed to make it easier) and she helped me to come out to my mum and to come out to my close friends. She supported me to do so but never forced me or did tell them (even when I struggled to say it). (trans girl, aged 16)

Being chosen social contacts, friends were often seen as the most positive relationships in participants' lives, who had also supported them in countering identity threats:

> Vaguely, they were the 'popular people' [who bullied me] … but the person that helped me drag out my emotions after school, is my internet best friend. (gender-questioning girl, aged 13)

Some participants with supportive friends (described by one participant as a "second family who make me feel normal and loved" (gender-questioning girl, aged 17)) also explained that they felt able to navigate identity threats themselves as a result of these friendships:

> Generally bullying doesn't affect me all that much long term, yeah sometimes it annoys me but I know that I have friends who support me and that I can go further in life than my bullies. (trans boy, aged 13)

Social support as a means of promoting resilience is well accounted for by theories of minority stress (I. H. Meyer, 2003). Having other LGBTQ+ friends also meant that some participants felt they had to challenge bullying: "As someone with a gay friend, a lesbian friend, 2 bi friends, a trans friend and some very strong opinions I stick up for all of them" (demigender/demigirl, aged 14). Support for other LGBTQ+ students was also an important motivator for some participants:

> I am currently talking to my school about becoming more diverse with students and talking about mental health and also LGBTQ+ issues in school. (trans girl, aged 16)

As the quotation above shows, some participants said that they were able to undertake activism at school, and another participant noted that pupils could go to "other students for advice, as they are too afraid to talk to staff" (gender-questioning girl, aged 13). These participants therefore aimed to improve the school environment for others, but this also put a burden on the 'first' person to come out:

> No one there has ever come out as trans or non-binary so no idea how the school would have handled it…they definitely would have made them wear the uniform relating to their biological sex. (gender-questioning girl, aged 17)

> I wore a skirt and my science teacher asked me to stay behind after class and said how boys might think it's ok for them to come to school in skirts if I was wearing one. This is now different and I'm allowed to wear both skirt and trousers. (non-binary person, aged 15)

Echoing the findings of Davy and Cordoba (2020), for some participants the burden of being a 'gender educator' (A. Goldberg & Kuvalanka, 2018) was felt to be especially heavy:

> The group of people sitting next to us were pretty popular, and I heard one of them start calling another one a "tranny". I turned round to them and politely explained that what they said was transphobic and they shouldn't say it, and they all laughed at me and gave me dirty looks for weeks. (trans boy, aged 14)

> I spoke to a teacher last week who tried to justify using gay as an insult. Though they were willing to listen to me explain how using it as a negative implies you believe there is something wrong with being gay. (nonbinary/genderfluid/agender person, aged 17)

Such findings suggest a dilemma for binary-trans, non-binary and gender-questioning young people: coming out at school might improve policies for others but coming out when the policies are non-inclusive is challenging. Proactive protection can therefore be interpreted as representing the balance of undertaking external identity work in the context of identity threats – balancing seeking out protection with safety. One participant's advice for others facing this difficulty was "remember that just because you are not out doesn't mean your sexuality or identity is invalid" (trans boy, aged 16).

It is worth noting that gender-questioning participants described using the strategy of proactive protection less than did non-binary or binary-trans participants. Their accounts included reference to a lack of social support ("In my online school I have no friends I feel completely isolated" (gender-questioning girl, aged 15)) and a lack of role models ("I'm not aware of any such role models" (gender-questioning boy, aged 17)). These findings suggest that due to uncertainty about their own identity, gender-questioning participants may have struggled to access LGBTQ+ resources. In the absence of students coming out one participant noted that schools do not create inclusive policies:

> I am still questioning [my gender] and it is really difficult in school especially as I go to an all-girls school, I still don't know what gender identity I am but I know that I will know, and one day I will be in a safe environment where I can come out and be accepted. (gender-questioning girl, aged 17)

A minority of students did experience extensive support, with their responses showcasing the potential for educators to construct such an environment:

> The school is amazing with homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, panphobia and many, many more…We have a club where we sometimes don't even talk about LGBT and the amazing LGBT teacher that runs it brings us cookies and we just sit in a room and talk about anything…I absolutely love it! (gender-questioning girl, aged 13)

More often, however, participants' experiences at school were found to be unsupportive. As one participant stated in relation to their school experience, "It sucks, but I try to remain proud" (genderfluid person, aged 17).

2.4: Discussion

The findings of this study offer a unique insight into the school experiences and identity processes of gender-diverse adolescents, addressing two RQs in particular: what are the school experiences and identity processes of binary-trans, non-binary and gender-questioning adolescents; and do these factors differ between these three groups? This study took as its point of departure that understanding the ways in which normativities are enacted in the school environment is important, not least because they pose a particular threat to the development of the self in adolescence. Identity threats were defined as the experiences and norms appraised as indicating potential harm to the value, meanings, or enactment of an identity (Petriglieri, 2011). The findings indicate that participants experienced identity threats in multiple ways in the school environment, and threats within school came not only from bullying by other pupils, but also from teachers, curricula and spaces. These threats resulted in identity work. Identity work was defined as the range of activities that individuals engage in to develop, present and sustain identities that are congruent with the self that they themselves perceive to be true. By undertaking the constant process of identity work, participants were able to develop and protect their identities. Findings showed that participants' ability to undertake this work differed due to several factors, including gender identity and levels of social and institutional support. Moreover, it was found that participants within the three groups (binary-trans, non-binary and gender-questioning) experienced both similarities and differences in terms of identity threats and identity work. Below, the study's findings and how they relate to the study's theoretical frameworks are discussed, firstly in terms of identity threats, and secondly in terms of identity work. Finally, the educational implications of the findings are discussed.

Identity threats

Who are the bullies?

The study's findings both corroborate and extend the existing literature on the school experiences of gender-diverse youth. In line with previous research, participants' experienced high levels of discrimination and bullying (Kosciw et al., 2018; LGBT Youth Scotland, 2018; METRO, 2016; Myers et al., 2020), and all participants reported experiencing threats to their gender identity at school. Bullying was found to take the form of inappropriate questions,

physical abuse, rumour spreading, misgendering, name-calling and jokes.[53] Such threats were found to have a number of effects, including mental health issues and self-harm, echoing previous research that has established a relationship between discrimination at school and negative mental health outcomes (S. T. Russell et al., 2018; Veale et al., 2017; Wyss, 2004).

The findings of this study qualitatively extend understandings of the multiple forms of discrimination that gender-diverse youth experience at school. Participants experienced bullying from other students, and teachers were often found to ignore this bullying. Previous research has suggested that teachers can be 'bullying bystanders', and as passive bystanders, serve to perpetuate power struggles within the school context (Twemlow et al., 2004, 2006). Within this study, some participants reported that teachers were not just bystanders, but bullies themselves. Behaviour by teachers was found to be crucial in determining the experiences of students within school, a finding that corroborates previous quantitative research (T. Jones et al., 2016). These findings therefore point to the importance of developing anti-bullying measures that target not only school students, but also their teachers (see educational implications below).

Transnormativity as threat

The present study is unique in its analytical approach. By separately analysing the experiences of binary-trans, non-binary and gender-questioning adolescents, its findings prompt further inquiry into the similarities and differences between the experiences of these three groups. Although research has begun to explore quantitative differences between binary-trans and non-binary youth's experiences of mental health and discrimination (Aparicio-García et al., 2018; Kosciw et al., 2018; Rimes et al., 2019; Thorne et al., 2019), this study is the first to qualitatively analyse binary-trans, non-binary and gender-questioning adolescents' school experiences separately. Findings suggest that approaching these groups separately in academic research is useful in that some experiences of discrimination were shown to be qualitatively different between the three groups. For instance, binary-trans participants were often found to be able to access alternative spaces (that were, however, inappropriate and othering) while non-binary and gender-questioning participants described a lack of identity accommodation at school in terms of both physical and metaphorical space. Findings about the experiences of non-binary and gender-questioning participants overall suggest that navigating an environment with an

[53] It has been suggested that individuals who are stigmatised become an 'open person' and that privilege is associated with an assumption of being able to ask any questions (Orne, 2013) – shuster (2017) labelled this a form of discursive aggression against trans people. Ahmed's work on being a feminist killjoy is also relevant here in understanding the impact of constant 'jokes' at the expense of one's identity: "a killjoy knows from experience: when people keep making light of something, something heavy is going on" (Ahmed, 2016, p. 29).

identity that is either unintelligible or uncertain may present unique challenges for individuals who identify in these ways.

Notably, these findings are at odds with those of the few studies to have included gender/sexuality questioning youth as a separate group to date, which would suggest less discriminatory experiences among this group than experienced by their LGBTQ+ counterparts (Kosciw et al., 2018; Myers et al., 2020). The reasons for the lack of similarity between these findings are likely due to the methods used, and, in particular, the qualitative approach of this study. In understanding these discrepancies, a minority stress approach (Meyer, 2003) is useful: whilst gender-questioning youth may experience less distal stressors (due to not being out in the school environment), proximal stressors may nevertheless remain high, due to the complexity of identity work and strategy choice in the context of identity related uncertainty. The findings of this study therefore offer a unique contribution to the research field and future research could take a minority stress approach to understanding further the experiences of gender-questioning youth.

Participants' experiences suggest that legal gender/name changes were valorised at school and this can be understood as an expression of transnormativity. Legal gender recognition is not an available option for gender-diverse youth, limiting the support available at school. It is also important to consider that name changes may require parental support, which youth may not have, thus demonstrating that studying the experiences of youth without parental support is crucial. Within this study, 25% of the non-binary participants explicitly said no to the question 'are you trans'. Research with non-binary adults suggests that they may not identify as transgender due to not considering themselves 'trans enough', or having suffered enough (Darwin, 2020). Whilst comparing degrees of suffering is arguably more divisive than it is helpful, in this study, non-binary participants were found to be less well-accommodated in the existing school framework than were binary-trans participants. Future research could further explore the complex relationship between the experiences of non-binary and binary-trans youth in the context of transnormativity.

Identity work in the context of identity threat

The findings contribute to the limited existing research on the strategies of identity work used by gender-diverse youth in school. In accordance with previous research, participants consistently negotiated disclosure in school and undertook education and activism to improve the school environment (Travers, 2018). The finding that participants who were not heterosexual described it as easier to come out as LGB compared to coming out as gender-diverse also supports previous research on the greater discrimination experienced by gender-diverse youth compared to cis LGBTQ youth (Myers et al., 2020). Moreover, the finding that

some participants' identities had become the subject of gossip meant that they sometimes veered between invisibility and hypervisibility (see DePalma & Atkinson, 2009). This suggests that the intersection of gender diversity and adolescence can be especially difficult, given that rumour spreading in adolescence is common (Malamut et al., 2018).

Not just bullying

As discussed in the introduction, bullying discourses limit the discussion of the normativities underlying bullying (Formby, 2015). Within this study, one way in which normativities were found to be enacted, and gender-diversity thus erased in the school environment, was through the lack of LGBTQ+ inclusive teaching. Teaching on LGBTQ+ issues was found to be either non-existent or limited to gay and lesbian issues, thus echoing previous findings from UK surveys (Government Equalities Office, 2019; METRO, 2016; Terrence Higgins Trust, 2016). Such findings also suggest that in some schools the culture may be changing to accommodate cisgender lesbian and gay youth, but this may in fact be perceived by other LGBTQ+ youth, including those with diverse sexual and gender identities, as further excluding them. Findings also suggest that teachers' levels of (mis)understanding around gender-diversity varied considerably, suggesting that it is important that teachers receive compulsory education on gender-diversity so that they are equipped to offer inclusive curricula. Given that recent governmental guidance states that all pupils should be "taught LGBT content at a timely point" (Department for Education, 2019, p. 15), this may be subject to change. Whether curricula will be transformed such that gender-diverse students feel safe and supported remains to be seen.

Another way in which normativities were found to be enacted was through the provision and policing of spaces (see also Roen, 2019). Findings suggest that negative experiences within, and the policing of, toilets/changing rooms are common, with the finding that teachers were felt to police these environments both due to concerns for the participants in this study *and* other students, echoing Travers' (2018) research. Whilst safety for gender-diverse people within toilets is a legitimate concern (Charlotte Jones & Slater, 2020), when coupled with the finding that participants' preferences around toilet use were ignored,[54] this would suggest that there may be a hierarchy of student safety concerns among UK school teachers, as found in Frohard-Dourlent's (2018) research with teachers in Canada. Exactly why there is concern for cis students sharing a toilet/changing room with gender-diverse students is unclear, but research has suggested that they are thought to be a threat (particularly to women-only spaces) (e.g. Charlotte Jones & Slater, 2020; Patel, 2017). The findings of the present study suggest that such fears may also be alive in school policies, demonstrating the pervasive nature of transphobic

[54] This should be understood as evidence of cisgenderism, as participants' own understandings of their identities and bodies were marginalised in favour of cisnormative understandings (Ansara & Hegarty, 2012).

assumptions about gender-diverse individuals as threatening. Toilets and changing rooms ('highly gendered spaces') can therefore be seen a site of exclusion for gender-diverse individuals at different stages of the life course, in that their own autonomy is denied in favour of cisnormative regulation of bodies (Roen, 2019).

Identity control theory in adolescence: power

Identity control theory, which posits that identity processes require congruence between situational meanings (such as reflected appraisals) and the identity standard (one's own conceptualisation of the self), can be used to understand the way in which participants navigated the school environment. Participants aimed to promote this congruence via a number of strategies: disclosure negotiation involved aiming to control situational meanings and limit the possibility for negative reflected appraisals and denial involved aiming to negate the existence of negative situational meanings, thus eliminating incongruence. A strength of identity control theory in general is that it accounts for the possibility that, when faced with negative appraisals, an individual's own understanding of themselves may change. However, as Burke (2000, p. 5) has noted, "most people would leave the situation rather than endure such changes to who they are". Within this study, some participants were able to change schools, thus leaving a negative situation, but gender-diverse adolescents were more often found to be at a school (which they are legally required to attend) that they could not leave. Given this, identity control theory may be a useful lens through which to understand the high incidence of mental health problems and suicide attempts among gender-diverse adolescents (Becerra-Culqui et al., 2018; Connolly et al., 2016; Irish et al., 2019; Kaltiala-Heino et al., 2015; Mustanski et al., 2010; S. T. Russell & Fish, 2016). Being stuck in an environment with consistently negative reflected appraisals, and no opportunity to experience positive reflected appraisals, likely poses a significant challenge to the maintenance of a positive self-concept.

Doing gender-fluidity?

As previously highlighted, the non-binary and gender-questioning participants in this study experienced difficulties in doing gender at school. Theories of doing gender explore the ways in which gender exists in, and is reinforced through, social interaction. Additionally, doing gender theories explain the ways in which individuals are held accountable to the sex categories of male and female: to be perceived as intelligible is to be perceived in correspondence to a sex category. Studies of the experiences of non-binary adults have found that 'doing non-binary gender' presents a challenge (Darwin, 2017), and the same was found among the non-binary adolescents in the present work. Such findings demonstrate that non-binary individuals not only live in a 'legal vacuum' (Neary, 2018), but also arguably a 'social vacuum'. Of particular note is the finding that gender-questioning students' identity work was made difficult by their own

uncertainty about their gender identity.[55] This finding can be understood using both SSI and doing gender theory: in order for gender-questioning individuals to develop their identities, they may need to 'do' multiple genders in social interaction, such as by trying different pronouns or wearing different types of clothing. However, given that cisnormativity assumes a stable adherence to the gender binary, opportunities to 'do gender-fluidity' at school may be limited. Interpreted through this lens, accountability is violated when gender fluidity is 'done' – fluid gender is not accountable to a sex category, and this disrupts the binary within social interaction. Other research has similarly explored the way in which fluidity is 'foreclosed' in social interaction and the stability of categories upheld, even within LGBTQ+ spaces (Sumerau et al., 2020), suggesting that this may be a potential avenue for future empirical, and theoretical, work.

The findings of this study also attest to the importance of the concept of authenticity to some gender-diverse adolescents. McQueen (2016, p. 560) has argued that "identity formation is a social affair: for any of us to properly 'have' an identity we require others to ascribe that identity to us". However, the focus on gender-diverse adolescents in this study, and particularly those whose identities were not recognised at school, raises a key question: can an individual have an identity if it is not recognised at an interactional or institutional level? If gender exists only through interactions and within institutions, this presents a paradox in which gender's 'realness' is denied and trans lives are seen as a deconstructive tool, which may not align with the lived experiences of gender-diverse individuals (Dozier, 2005; Hines, 2006b, 2010). In this case, gender theorisation arguably fails to account for the subjective realities of gender-diverse individuals. Indeed, the significance of individualised concepts, such as gender authenticity, are arguably neglected in symbolic interactionist theories (Risman, 2018). In particular, the finding that participants who did not perceive their identities to be recognised by others nevertheless described experiencing their gender as subjectively authentic is especially relevant. Acknowledging *subjective authenticity* does not discount the inherently social nature of the self, but rather challenges the idea that in order to have an identity, it must be recognised by others. Put differently, while queer theorists have suggested that "one only determines 'one's own' sense of gender to the extent that social norms exist that support and enable that act of claiming gender for oneself" (Butler, 2004, p. 7), the lack of social norms to 'support or enable' the young people in this study to claim their identities, combined with their expressions of subjective authenticity, pose a clear conceptual challenge to existing theorisations of gender.

[55] Of course, individuals identifying as binary-trans and non-binary may experience their gender as fluid, and therefore may also feel uncertain about how to manage disclosure.

The findings therefore suggest that doing gender theory may be too focused on interactional gender, particularly when considering identities that are denied within social interaction. Scholars such as Risman (2004, 2018) have suggested that it is important to study gender at three levels: individual, interactional and institutional. It is therefore necessary for future theorisations of gender to account for experiences of gender both inside and outside of interpersonal interaction. Indeed, a useful addition to gender theory could be to consider the way in which gender is done at an individual level. Such an account would not be inconsistent with the theoretical position of SSI adopted in this thesis. For instance, although doing gender theory refers to gender in interaction, it can be suggested that the participants in this study experienced gender at an intrapersonal level. This 'intrapersonal interaction' may be particularly important for individuals whose gender is denied within interpersonal interaction or in interactions with institutions. In other words, the inner dialogue of self and identity, even if not expressed at an interactional level due to (anticipated) stigma and discrimination, ought to be interpreted as a way of doing gender. Future research could explore this further, with the aim of understanding the way in which individuals understand gender at an individual, intrapersonal level.

A 'good' adjustment?

This study found that some participants experienced some degree of (tokenistic) accommodation or acceptance of their identity – examples include being allowed to use staff toilets, minimal inclusion of LGBTQ+ issues within curricula, and stances towards discriminatory language which were not followed through. These experiences can be understood using stigma theory, and in particular Goffman's (1963) concepts of 'phantom acceptance' and a 'good adjustment'. Goffman suggested that stigmatised individuals may experience a relatively low level of conditional acceptance, termed 'phantom acceptance', and that they must act "as if the conditional acceptance of [them], which [they are] careful not to overreach, is full acceptance" (Goffman, 1963, p. 148). Overreaching this acceptance, according to Goffman (1963, p.121), would mean that non-stigmatised individuals would "have to admit to themselves how limited their tactfulness and tolerance is", thus leading him to suggest that a 'good adjustment' is "an even better one for society". In the present study, a 'good adjustment' would require that gender-diverse youth be satisfied with marginal accommodation within the school environment (such as getting an LGBTQ+ club). This marginal accommodation is not sufficient in ensuring that gender-diverse youth are fully supported at school. Indeed, it has been suggested that it is important to think about 'liveability' of LGBTQ+ lives (i.e., what makes a life liveable rather than just survivable) (Browne et al., 2019; Butler, 2004) and it can be suggested that simple inclusion measures (which, in this sample, were not the most common experience overall) are not sufficient in ensuring that the lives of gender-diverse adolescents

are liveable. Previous research has noted that gender non-conforming youth are focused on surviving (rather than thriving) at school (Wyss, 2004), something that is corroborated by the present study's finding of phantom acceptance among participants.

Some participants recognised such 'phantom acceptance' at school, and aimed to overcome this by improving the school environment for themselves, their friends, and other LGBTQ+ students. Such findings relate to Goffman's (1963, p.172) conceptualisation of 'social deviants' who "flaunt their refusal to accept their place and are temporarily tolerated…providing it is restricted within the ecological boundaries of their community". Indeed, it is possible to interpret the specific LGBTQ+ groups and specific LGBTQ+ friends described by participants in these terms, echoing Bragg et al.'s (2018) finding of 'pockets' where LGBTQ young people can be themselves. In this study, whilst these pockets of spaces for expression were clearly important for participants, limiting gender-diverse youth to specific spaces, when the rest of the school's environment is discriminatory, fails to fundamentally challenge normative environments, and seems more like tolerance than inclusion.

Childhood as a construct

Participants' experiences of what has, in this study, been termed identity work in the context of identity threats should also be understood in relation to age. It is clear that participants in this study were denied autonomy due to being under 18 years of age. 'Childhood', which is characterised in the UK by dependency, vulnerability and assumptions of innocence, has been described as a notion used to justify restricting children's rights (Appell, 2009; Travers, 2018). Moreover, childhood is a social construct, in that it is socially and historically situated, and that children's vulnerability performs differently "according to unique aspects of childhood, as well as along racial, class, and gender lines that affect not only children themselves, but also the adults on whom they depend" (Appell, 2009, p. 706). Although different children therefore experience childhood in different ways, it seems that overall, gender-diverse adolescents' relationship to such contextually-grounded notions of childhood is problematic. Gender-diverse youth may be dependent on caregivers to take them to appointments, or to pay for items that allow them to express their gender (such as binders).[56] Additionally, it is clear that gender-diverse youth are generally not credited with having knowledge of their own identities (see p.14) and, as Travers (2018, p. 41) has noted, "children, who are understood as not yet fully human, are rendered less real, their feelings and desires less important, and their capacity for agency limited at best".

[56] As aforementioned (p. 45), one of the advantages of this study is that it waived parental consent, meaning that youth with and without parental support were able to take part.

In the present study, participants' identity development and expression were found in part to depend on teachers' support of their identities. The conceptualisation of childhood as a social construct thus helps to further understand their experiences, insofar as they represent not only being non-cis in a cisgenderist world, but also being under 18 in a world that assumes that adolescents cannot make independent decisions about themselves and their identities.

Limitations

Notwithstanding its strengths, this study has a number of limitations. Firstly, participants were selected on the basis of having answered more than half of the open-ended questions in the survey. Although participants were invited to share both negative and positive experiences, those with more neutral experiences may have answered fewer questions. Secondly, the identities of trans boy and trans girl were collapsed into 'binary-trans' so as to explore the potential differences between binary-trans, non-binary and gender-questioning youth. However, this categorisation did not allow for an exploration of any differences between trans boys and trans girls: girls may be particularly at risk for discrimination due to transmisogyny, a unique intersectional form of sexism that, in the context of societal devaluation of women, impacts trans women specifically (Arayasirikul & Wilson, 2019; Serano, 2012). Considering that most binary-trans participants in this study were boys rather than girls, future research could thus explore the unique experiences of trans girls.

Perhaps the greatest limitation of this study is that it did not take an intersectional approach. An in-depth intersectional analysis was not possible, given the specificities of the dataset, and in particular the way in which the survey only asked participants about their experiences of being LGBTQ+, leading to limited reflection from participants on their experiences through an intersectional lens.[57] Participants were majority white, middle-class and able-bodied, and this can be contrasted with research suggests that there are a higher proportion of gender-diverse youth who are non-white and of low SES (Eisenberg et al., 2017), and that economic precarity is related to increased risk of health problems (Frost et al., 2019). Representations of trans youth are typically white and middle-class (Gill-Peterson, 2018; Paechter, 2020), which points to the importance of understanding the experiences of economically and racially diverse trans youth. Discrimination against trans and non-binary individuals who are racialised has been found to be higher than those who identify and/or are perceived as white (Chih et al., 2020). Qualitative research with black, non-binary college students found that participants reported feeling excluded from both queer and/or black spaces, and that staff did not understand their identities intersectionally (Nicolazzo, 2016). It has thus been acknowledged that situating trans youth

[57] Moreover, given that the focus for this study was on analysing the experiences of binary-trans, non-binary and gender-questioning youth separately, creating further intersectional categories within the data would not have been appropriate.

within broader relations of power and oppression is important (Travers, 2018), although this is not often done. For instance, trans girls/women of colour have often been missed out from trans studies, but are at a particular risk of violence (de Vries, 2015; Vidal-Ortiz, 2009). This study is therefore limited in that it does not engage with the multiple intersections of participants' identities. Extant research within the US has explored the experiences of trans youth intersectionally (e.g. Frost et al., 2019; Travers, 2018; Gill-Peterson, 2018), and it is important for future research within the UK to do the same.

Despite these limitations, this study offers a unique insight into the school experiences and identity processes of gender-diverse youth, and the relationships between these, within the UK context. The analytical approach of separating the experiences of binary-trans, non-binary and gender-questioning adolescents has enabled an in-depth exploration of similarities and differences between the groups, and the waiver of parental consent allowed for the inclusion of youth irrespective of levels of family support. As described in part above, the study also has a number of important educational implications, which will now be explored.

Educational implications: assuming gender diversity

It seems that there is a need for a fundamental restructuring of the education system, if it is to be at all accommodating of binary-trans, non-binary and gender-questioning pupils. It should be recognised that these groups may have different needs. For instance, binary-trans students may be able to be facilitated *within* gendered spaces, whereas non-binary students may require spaces that are specifically gender-neutral, and gender-questioning students may need the freedom to explore different identities and use different spaces accordingly. The main educational implications of this study are that schools need to assume gender-diversity; that toilets and changing rooms need to be modified; and that school policy relating to gender-diversity needs to be flexible. Importantly, these recommendations are based on the experiences and suggestions of participants in this thesis. Listening to those who are most impacted by school policies is crucial.

The findings of this study would suggest that participants' schools did not assume gender diversity in their student population. Some participants were the first student to be 'out' in their school, and their experiences make clear that certain students were used as "sacrificial lambs" (E. J. Meyer et al., 2016, p. 17). It has been previously noted that schools commonly rely on students coming out to incite change (Davy & Cordoba, 2019; E. J. Meyer & Leonardi, 2018). Yet exposure as a means of diversity inclusion fails to consider the needs not only of the gender-diverse students who are subject to exposure, but also of the gender-diverse students who are not 'out' at school. Students who have not disclosed their identity at school will not be protected by reactive, individualised policies. Moreover, the finding that experiences varied considerably

from school to school points to the importance of moving beyond talking about individual schools to thinking about nationwide policy (Renz, 2020). Without nationwide policy changes, it is unlikely that most schools will continue to assume a lack of gender diversity among their pupils.

This empirically grounded recommendation leads to the question of what supportive policy might look like. Findings suggest a need for flexible policies, anti-discrimination efforts, and inclusive education. For example, a number of participants noted that policies were inflexible – such as the experiences of binary-trans students prohibited from changing their name. Flexible policies would allow students to choose how they identified and which spaces they engaged in, thus encouraging autonomy, rather than restricting it. Moreover, a number of participants in this study spoke about a culture of bullying that was encouraged by teachers, suggesting that both staff training and student education on gender diversity is now needed. Importantly, this would mean fundamentally challenging cisgenderism in the school environment, thus enabling teachers to be supportive of gender diversity (see Frohard-Dourlent, 2018).

Alongside specific education about gender diversity, integrating LGBTQ issues into the curriculum has been found to be associated with greater perceived school safety and lower rates of bullying in LGBTQ youth (Snapp, McGuire, et al., 2015). Given that misunderstandings about non-binary identities and gender fluidity were especially common among both teachers and students, integrating both binary-trans and non-binary identities into the curriculum would be an important, normalising step. One study found that teachers' comfort levels with integrating LGBT themes into the curriculum differed according to a number of factors: younger teachers were more comfortable, whereas rural and strongly religious teachers were less so (Page, 2017). Policy design and implementation should therefore consider the specific barriers to accommodating gender-diversity within different schools and different classrooms.

Finally, this study's findings suggest that it would be beneficial to remove male and female toilets and changing rooms at school (see Ingrey, 2018 for a further discussion of policy). Replacing these with individual toilets/changing rooms, used by all genders, would remove the high levels of stress associated with toilet/changing room use, and would also limit policing of these spaces by other students and teachers, each important findings in this work. Additionally, it is recommended that all uniforms be wearable by all. To date, it has been suggested that there is a tendency for 'gender-neutral uniform' to be synonymous with male uniform (i.e. schools allowing all students to wear trousers, but only allowing 'girls' to wear skirts) (Renz, 2020), which may potentially allow trans boys to have access to appropriate clothing, but further pathologise trans girls who wish to wear feminine clothing. For non-binary and gender-

questioning students, allowing uniform choice would arguably allow for greater experimentation within the school environment.

Aiming for utopia?

Given the hostility and backlash towards smaller LGBTQ initiatives such as rainbow zebra crossings (Busby, 2020), the above recommendations may be deemed more idealistic than realistic. However, to aim for anything other than ideal is to ask gender-diverse youth themselves to change. It is therefore important to aim to dismantle cisgenderism within schools, rather than continuing with individualised approaches (Airton, 2013; DePalma & Atkinson, 2009; Wyss, 2004), the limitations of which this study makes clear. In this, the distinction made by Travers (2018) between allowing children to transition *in* school, and transitioning *the* school away from normative systems is useful, and focus should be maintained on the latter. Doing this would situate the problem not within gender-diverse youth, but within the normative systems that make them vulnerable.

It should also be recognised that the proposed changes would benefit all students. Uniform changes would allow cis boys who wish to wear feminine clothing to do so at school.[58] School toilets and changing rooms have also been found to be frightening, unpleasant and a site of bullying for many cisgender youth (Vernon et al., 2003), and current spaces do not empower children with non-normative bodies, such as those with disabilities and diverse sexual/gender identities (Slater et al., 2018). Although it may not be possible to immediately phase out all gendered toilets/changing rooms, it would be possible to convert existing single stall toilets to all-gender spaces, and to mandate that any newly developed facilities are multi-stall, all-gender facilities (A. Hillier et al., 2020). Ultimately, dismantling cisgenderism would positively impact all students, particularly if integrated into a broader anti-oppression programme, enabling all students to thrive.

This study suggests that the UK is at a critical point. An increasing number of children and young adults are questioning their gender and adopting diverse identities. However, UK schools are not currently suitable for these adolescents, and it is the adolescents themselves that bear the weight of the often daily "deadly paper cuts of misrecognition and binarification" (Fine et al., 2018, p. 29). The participants within this study were found to be at the forefront of changing school policy themselves, demonstrating that it is possible for changes within the school system

[58] Celebrity Harry Styles recently became the first male cover star of US Vogue, and he did so wearing a dress (Elan, 2020). On one hand, this suggests that societal acceptance of male femininity may be increasing; on the other hand, the heavy criticism that this received suggests that this option may be still be far off for adolescents in schools, and that boys may continue to face 'effeminaphobia' (Travers, 2018).

to be implemented. It is important that schools support students in their activism, but reduce the burden on individual students to educate others. Given that adolescence is a time of developmental growth and change, gender-diverse adolescents need to be fully supported in this trajectory.

Chapter 3: Trans and/or non-binary parents: pioneering and pragmatism

3.1: Introduction

Despite limited evidence on the number of parents who identify as TNB, US estimates suggest that around 0.6% of the population are trans (Crissman et al., 2017; Flores, Herman, et al., 2016) and 19% of trans people are parents (Carone et al., 2020). These are highly likely to be underestimates due to a lack of data on gender identity (Tornello, 2020), but they nevertheless suggest that there are considerable numbers of TNB individuals raising children. However, little is known about the experiences of TNB parents. As discussed in Chapter 1, TNB parents face extensive discrimination at multiple levels and in multiple domains, including legislation and the media. There is a societal assumption that TNB parenting is inferior to cis parenting, such that TNB parents have had their gender identity used to deny or restrict custody under the guise of the 'best interests of the child' (Chang, 2003; Cooper, 2013). Research on attitudes towards TNB people within the UK found that public attitudes were more accepting of trans people being employed as police officers than primary school teachers (Swales & Taylor, 2016), reflecting transphobic assumptions about trans people working with children. It is therefore crucial that research is conducted on the experiences of TNB parents themselves within this oppressive environment.

This chapter will begin with a review of the empirical research on TNB parent families. Firstly, the literature on 'becoming a trans and/or non-binary parent' will be discussed, specifically focussing on families that transition, imagined parenthood, adoption, and pregnancy. Secondly, the literature on 'being a trans and/or non-binary parent' will be discussed, and in particular the literature on navigating TNB parenthood, normativities, and intersectional approaches. The literature will be reviewed so as to demonstrate what is known about TNB parenting, but also to highlight the many gaps within the field, thus making clear the usefulness of the current study.

Although more attention will be given to discussing the experiences of TNB parents who become parents after identifying as TNB (the focus of the study described in this chapter), the experiences of TNB people who become parents before identifying as TNB will also be outlined.[59] This approach has been taken because these studies can nevertheless offer valuable insights for the present study. The two sets of experiences will be discussed separately in the

[59] The language of 'identifying as TNB' is used to refer to the process of identifying as TNB *in interaction* with others and is used instead of other phrases (such as transitioning or coming out) to reflect the fact that not all TNB people transition, and that coming out is a continual journey. Where other studies have used different terminology, this has been adopted.

section 'becoming a TNB parent' (as experiences here are considerably different) and they will be discussed together in the section 'being a TNB parent', as research on this topic is limited, and studies often include both groups of parents (Pyne, 2012).

Becoming a trans and/or non-binary parent

Families that transition

A number of studies have explored the ways in which parents negotiate and experience their gender transition within the context of the family, and these studies suggest that all family members also go through a 'transition' as they adjust to their family member's identity change (Dierckx et al., 2016; Haines et al., 2014; Hines, 2006a; Veldorale-Griffin, 2014; von Doussa et al., 2017). Studies have also shown that parents often prioritise their family's needs over their own, putting their transition on hold, for instance, to try and protect their family (Haines et al., 2014; Simpson, 2018; von Doussa et al., 2017). Hines's (2006a) case study of 3 transgender people, two of whom were parents, found that the transition process was negotiated in relation to parenting responsibilities, in accordance with the key values of trust, honesty and care. The transition process has been found to be highly stressful, with studies identifying experiences of familial rejection, job discrimination and fear of transphobia and violence (Veldorale-Griffin, 2014). A survey conducted in Ontario found that 29% of a sample of 110 trans parents saw their children less due to being trans, and 18% had no legal access to their child (Pyne et al., 2015). Therefore, TNB parents who begin identifying as TNB post-parenthood must negotiate their transition within the context of their family and the context of societal transphobia.

The notion of 'families that transition' can be further understood by examining the link between gender identity and familial roles, such as mother (generally assumed to be a cis woman) and father (generally assumed to be a cis man) (Norwood, 2012). For instance, one US study of 10 trans women who were parents found that participants delayed their transition with the aim of fulfilling their roles as fathers, which they felt were deemed essential by society (Simpson, 2018). Therefore, when a parent transitions, this may create ambiguity within family relationships. A small number of studies have focused on children's experiences of a parental gender transition – Zadeh et al. (2019) interviewed 29 children aged 5-18 within the UK, finding that most children described their parent's transition as having little impact upon their relationship, although a minority described feelings of loss associated with the change in perception of their parent, and some described rejection from extended family members. Another study of 30 adult children with transgender parents found that participants experienced ambiguity due to changes in their parent's identity and parental role (Tabor, 2019). This study found that participants aimed to reconceptualise their relationship, with some participants finding this more challenging than others. Such findings therefore suggest that

some children may go through an adjustment process, whereas others may find their parent's transition to have little impact on their relationship. In general, such research also demonstrates that gender and parenting identities may be linked, such that further exploration into precisely how these factors are interconnected is needed.

Some studies indicate that parents with different gender identities may have different experiences. For instance, research suggests that trans women are more likely to be parents - data from a probability sample in the US found that, amongst the 19% of trans respondents who were parents, 53% were trans women, 36% were non-binary people, and 11% were trans men (Carone et al., 2020). The US National Transgender Discrimination Survey (NTDS) surveyed 27,715 transgender people in the US, 18% of whom were parents. Of those who were out to their children, the survey found that transgender female parents were more likely to experience their children limiting contact with them (28%) than trans male (6%) and non-binary parents (6%) (S. E. James et al., 2016).[60] More generally, secondary analysis of data from the NTDS found that TNB individuals assigned male at birth were more likely to be parents (Walls et al., 2018), and a survey of 311 trans parents found that trans women were more likely to become parents before their transition, whereas trans men and non-binary people were more likely to become parents after their gender transition (Tornello et al., 2019). Therefore, experiences potentially differ based on gender identity, but this needs further exploration.

The research on families that transition therefore demonstrates some of the ways in which parental gender may be linked to parenting identities, and that this can impact other family members and family processes.[61] The research also suggest that trans women, trans men and non-binary parents may have different experiences.

'Imagining parenthood' (von Doussa et al., 2015)

The number of people identifying as TNB at a younger age is increasing (GIDS, 2020) and as such, it is important to study the experiences of people who will become parents after identifying as TNB. There have been a number of studies exploring potential routes to future parenthood in TNB adolescents and adults. A recent US study of 156 trans and gender-nonconforming adolescents found that 71% were interested in adoption, compared to 36% interested in biological parenthood (Chen et al., 2018). In contrast, a US study of 32 trans men

[60] Scholars such as Hines (2006a) have suggested that this could be due to greater societal acceptance of female androgyny than male femininity. Consistent with this finding, Apperson et al. (2015) found that attitudes towards the hypothetical scenario of a parent being trans were more positive if the mother identified as a trans man than the father identified as a trans woman, indicating potentially higher levels of discrimination against trans women who are parents.

[61] As such, these findings are consistent with family systems theory, which posits that a family is an interconnected system (Kerr & Bowen, 1988).

and women found that around half of participants were interested in biological parenthood, whereas a quarter of participants wanted to become parents via adoption or fostering (Tornello & Bos, 2017). Although both studies were US based, meaning that the findings may not be applicable to TNB individuals in the UK, such findings suggest that interest in adoption may be greater among younger TNB individuals than is the case among their older counterparts.

Despite TNB adolescents potentially having a high interest in adoption, research in the UK and US has found that TNB adults are fearful of experiencing discrimination within the adoption process, and that this impacts upon their decision-making around parenthood (A. Goldberg et al., 2020; Tasker & Gato, 2020). This suggests that TNB individuals' choices around parenting may be constrained by discrimination and/or anticipated stigma. Barriers to biological parenthood have also been noted, including the prohibitively high financial cost of gamete preservation and assisted reproduction (cárdenas, 2016; Chen et al., 2019; Tornello & Bos, 2017), and the potential difficulties that stopping hormone treatment and/or experiencing a pregnancy may entail (Tornello & Bos, 2017).

Such findings suggest that TNB individuals' imaginings around parenthood may be constrained by the realities of cisgenderist society. Indeed, Tasker and Gato's (2020) focus group study of 11 TNB adults found that both adoption and fertility services were thought to be unwelcoming towards TNB parenthood. Adoption services were thought to have become more accepting of same-gender couples, but not of TNB parents, and access to fertility services was restricted due to assumptions amongst health care professionals about the mutual exclusivity of being TNB and being a parent. Alternatively, some participants spoke about the potential for a 'pragmatic' approach to having a child, and the possibility for TNB pregnancy to be approached in a non-gendered way. Imagined parenthood can therefore be described as both diverging from cisnormative scripts, and being constrained by hegemonic family norms (von Doussa et al., 2015).

Studies on imagined parenthood also suggest differences under the 'TNB umbrella'. For example, Chen et al. (2018) found that more gender non-conforming youth were interested in biological parenthood than were transgender youth; Tornello and Bos (2017) found that trans men were more likely to be interested in biological parenthood and trans women more interested in adoption. Moreover, an Israeli study found that fertility preservation rates were higher among trans women than men, whereas the fertility preservation rate was higher among trans adolescent boys compared to trans girls (Amir et al., 2020). These mixed findings suggest that there may be important differences between trans men, women and non-binary people in terms of decision-making around parenthood, but more research is clearly needed to unpack this further.

Adoption

Given that TNB youth may be interested in adoption as a future route to parenthood (Chen et al., 2018), studying the experiences of trans and non-binary adoptive parents is important. However such research is distinctly lacking. A recent UK governmental review conducted interviews with key stakeholders: findings indicated a lack of knowledge about trans issues among social workers and no evidence of trans inclusion within social work education in England (Hudson-Sharp, 2018), suggesting that lack of knowledge is an institutional problem. Given the growing numbers of looked-after children within the UK (Department of Education, 2019), TNB adults potentially represent an untapped pool of adopters (C. Brown & Rogers, 2020), and studying their experiences is thus clearly important.

Trans and non-binary pregnancy: unintelligible identities?

A small body of research has focussed on the experiences of trans men (and to a lesser extent, non-binary people) who become pregnant. Some studies have found that men report their pregnancy to be a sacrifice that is necessary in order to have a child, but they also report that this sacrifice has a high cost, including feelings of isolation, exclusion and invisibility (Charter et al., 2018; Light et al., 2014). In one study with 10 trans male participants, a wide range of experiences (from isolation to extensive support) were reported; some participants asserted their identity as a pregnant man, whereas others tried to avoid being seen as such, in the face of societal unintelligibility (Hoffkling et al., 2017). An Australian study of 25 trans men also found that, in the context of exclusionary hegemonic narratives, participants imagined parenthood 'on their own terms', but also reported feelings of isolation (Charter et al., 2018).

Some of the studies that included non-binary participants have found similar experiences. Ellis et al.'s (2015) study of 8 male-identified/gender-variant gestational parents found that loneliness was the key emotion experienced by participants, owing to their navigation of identity struggles and disclosure decisions. One Canadian study of five non-binary parents found that participants experienced challenges in accessing appropriate clothing whilst pregnant, also finding that navigating the gender binary, whilst existing outside of it, was overall difficult (Fischer, 2020). An international study of 51 men, trans/masculine and non-binary people used the conceptual framework of 'normative resistance' and 'inventive pragmatism' (from Pfeffer, 2012)[62] to examine experiences of conception (Riggs et al., 2020). This study found that while some participants resisted certain family ideals, others were more pragmatic.

[62] Pfeffer's (2012) framework was developed based on interviews with cis female partners of trans men. Normative resistance refers to the way in which participants resisted being seen as a heterosexual couple and made choices that diverged from those celebrated in society (e.g. monogamy, marriage and parenthood). Inventive pragmatism describes how participants manipulated existing social structures that permitted 'heterosexual' legal marriage/parenthood to benefit their family.

For instance, some participants resisted donor matching, while others used donor matching as a safety strategy.[63] Importantly, some participants also described their conception as unproblematic and positive, suggesting that what makes TNB conception 'exceptional' is the lack of support that accompanies it (Fischer, 2020; Riggs et al., 2020).

Across numerous studies, TNB parents report predominantly negative experiences with clinicians (Charter et al., 2018; James-Abra et al., 2015; Light et al., 2014), although one Canadian study of 5 non-binary participants identified mostly positive experiences (Fischer, 2020). A survey of 41 trans men found that common experiences included encountering a dearth of knowledge among clinicians about the unique needs of pregnant men (Light et al., 2014). Non-hospital births were found to be more common than in cis pregnancies, with researchers suggesting that this could be due to anticipated negative hospital experiences (Light et al., 2014). In line with this, Fischer (2020) found that some participants deliberately planned a home birth in order to avoid uninclusive spaces, demonstrating the way in which transphobia may constrain TNB parents' choices in and around becoming parents. Similarly, in a study of trans people (n=9) and their cis partners (n=2), the majority of participants reported negative experiences, including encountering inappropriate paperwork and cisheteronormative assumptions (James-Abra et al., 2015). One participant reported having been turned away for fertility treatment due to their gender identity. Similarly, Riggs et al. (2020) found that participants' experiences in clinics were often negative, with some participants feeling forced to accept suboptimal treatment. Such experiences were contrasted with more positive experiences of using a known donor/partner gametes, again highlighting that TNB conception does not need to be problematic or difficult, and that positive experiences (notably those outside of clinical services) can be identified. Such findings demonstrate the importance of improving clinical services for TNB individuals, and ensuring inclusivity and sensitivity throughout the process of becoming a parent (Moseson et al., 2020; Obedin-Maliver & Makadon, 2016). Indeed, although less common, positive experiences with clinicians included proper pronoun/name use, familiarity with gender diversity and warmth towards TNB individuals (Fischer, 2020; James-Abra et al., 2015; Light et al., 2014).

Research therefore suggests that TNB pregnancy is characterised by difficult decision-making about disclosure (Charter et al., 2018; Hoffkling et al., 2017; Light et al., 2014), within the context of societal cisgenderism. Pregnancy can mostly therefore be seen as a 'functional sacrifice' (Charter et al., 2018) or a pragmatic approach to becoming a parent (Tasker & Gato, 2020). Extant literature on becoming a TNB parent has focused primarily on pregnancy in trans

[63] Donor matching is the process of choosing a sperm donor whose physical characteristics resemble those of the non-genetic parent (Caroline Jones, 2005).

men (cárdenas, 2016). Although one study did consider the unique situation of non-binary pregnancy (Fischer, 2020), most studies that included non-binary pregnant people have not investigated the potential differential experiences relating to gender identity (e.g. Ellis et al., 2015; Riggs et al., 2020). This is an important line of inquiry, particularly given that in the most recent US NTDS, non-binary people reported experiencing higher levels of disrespect from general health providers than did transgender people (Kattari et al., 2020). Moreover, the experiences of TNB non-birth parents have not yet been explored, and where LGBTQ people have been included in research on non-birth parents, they are very much in the minority (see also Abelsohn et al., 2013).

Being a trans and/or non-binary (TNB) parent

Compared to the research on becoming a TNB parent, the research on *being* a TNB parent is much less extensive. This section reviews the research on navigating TNB parenthood, the normativities that may underlie such experiences, and the importance of intersectional approaches.

Navigating TNB parenthood

A small number of studies have documented the social experiences of TNB parents, and the ways in which parents navigate uninclusive environments. Studies have highlighted the complex negotiation process that TNB parents undertake on a daily basis, balancing the need to assert their authentic identity with the need to protect both themselves and their children from transphobia (Fischer, 2020; Haines et al., 2014; von Doussa et al., 2015). In general, this research has identified that parents experience multiple forms of discrimination, from overt harassment to erasure and, in light of this, actively use strategies to navigate transphobic settings, making choices about visibility, advocating for themselves, and educating their children about transphobia (Pyne, 2012). A recent study in the US found that, despite the barriers and stigmas faced by trans parents, they did not report worse mental health outcomes than trans non-parents and cis parents/non-parents (Carone et al., 2020), suggesting that having children is a positive and fulfilling life event for many TNB parents.

Social support, a factor that has been found to be important in cis LGB families (e.g. Goldberg & Smith, 2008; Leal et al., 2021; Sumontha et al., 2016), may also impact the experiences of TNB parents. For instance, non-affirmation of gender identity has been shown to be associated with higher levels of parenting stress and lower levels of perceived social support (Imrie et al., 2020).[64] Support from extended family has been noted as a protective factor (Hafford-Letchfield

[64] However, these associations were not significant when researchers controlled for the time lapsed since the parent had communicated their gender identity to the child; parents who had more recently disclosed

et al., 2019; Riggs et al., 2016), and it has been found that parents who are partnered experience more support from their family of origin (Riggs et al., 2016), suggesting that single TNB parents and those without supportive partners may be at particular risk of experiencing a lack of social support.

The majority of research has focused on the difficulties that TNB parents may face. Considering the pervasiveness of cisgenderism, this is of course important, but there has been a lack of research on the positive factors that TNB parents may be able to bring to parenting. Research with TNB parents has found that they feel able to be better parents owing to their experiences of identity struggles, and feel able to model authenticity and acceptance for their children (Pyne, 2012). Such findings have also been used to suggest that TNB individuals might be particularly effective adoptive parents, insofar as, as a result of their own identity journey, they may be able to offer increased sensitivity to the identity issues that adoptive children can face (C. Brown & Rogers, 2020). It has also been suggested that children may gain increased gender literacy due to having a TNB parent (Pyne, 2013), as parents aim to construct home environments free from gender and sexuality norms (Averett, 2016).

Some research has examined the ways in which TNB parents negotiate parenting in the context of highly gendered parenting roles. TNB parents may take on non-normative parenting roles, such as step-parenthood (von Doussa et al., 2015), and divide household and childcare labour in egalitarian ways (Tornello, 2020), suggesting a rejection of more normative ways of doing family. In Fischer's (2020) study of five non-binary birth parents, participants found navigating their parenting identities outside of traditional scripts to be challenging, given the lack of parental designations for non-binary parents. In Simpson's (2018) research, a high level of identity tension was found among participants who identified as both women and fathers, suggesting difficulties with navigating conflicting parental and gender identities.[65] Given that the interaction between parental identity and gender may therefore be different for parents with different gender identities, there is a need to understand this further.

The research on being a TNB parent therefore suggests that parents may use a number of strategies to navigate parenting spaces, as these spaces are often uninclusive of diverse gender identities. To understand this further, it is important to examine the normativities that may underlie these experiences.

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their identity to their child experienced more non-affirmation and higher levels of parenting stress. This suggests that experiences of non-affirmation may decrease over time.

[65] All parents in Simpson's (2018) study had become fathers at a young age, and identified as trans women much later. Therefore, navigation of gender roles may be different for individuals who identify as trans since before having children.

Normativities within parenting spaces

Parenting spaces can be said to be governed by a number of normativities. The normativities outlined in Chapter 1 (cisheteronormativity and transnormativity) will be explored in so far as they relate to parenting spaces, and the concept of homonormativity introduced.

The traditional, 'gold-standard' model of the nuclear family is that of a married, cisgender, heterosexual couple with their biologically related children (Tasker et al., 2018), and is based on cisheteronormativities. Homonormativity refers to the way in which some cis gay and lesbian individuals – notably those who conform to certain ideals, such as marriage, monogamy and domesticity – may be accepted into heteronormative society (Duggan, 2002). Privileges may therefore be gained by 'gender-normative' gay and lesbian individuals who draw upon similar essentialist understandings of gender as those found in heteronormative populations, thus serving to further exclude TNB identities that problematise and draw attention to normativities "within and between gender/sexual identity categories" (Susan Stryker, 2008a, p. 149). Relating these insights to the topic of family specifically, it has been suggested that cis lesbian and gay, married two-parent families can be assimilated into heteronormative culture, as they resemble heterosexual nuclear families (with the exception of their sexuality) (Nay, 2015).[66] Where it occurs, this assimilation therefore potentially excludes parents who do not conform to such norms, namely those who are trans and/or non-binary, unmarried or in families with many parents (multi-parent families), that are the result of polyamorous relationships and/or platonic co-parenting arrangements (Allen & Mendez, 2018).[67]

Building upon this notion, the concept of transnormativity has been outlined, and refers to the way in which TNB individuals are held accountable to a binary, medical model of gender (Johnson, 2016). TNB individuals who experience fluid identities, and/or who do not identify as either male or female, may experience especially high levels of discrimination in that their identities may be misunderstood and delegitimised (Sumerau et al., 2020). This concept was explored by Garrison (2018), who found that non-binary individuals tended to minimise inconsistencies within their accounts of gender, presenting narratives which reflected 'typical' accounts of trans experiences, in order to authenticate themselves as 'fully' trans. Additionally, research with non-binary adults found that participants' identities were thought to not be 'real' identities by others, and that they received hostility relating to their use of neutral pronouns (Darwin, 2017).

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[66] This passive 'assimilationist' view has been critiqued (Hayden, 1995) and it has alternatively been suggested that gay and lesbian individuals are "exploiting the ambiguity of dominant cultural symbols by inhabiting their interstices" (Schneider, 1997, p. 272).

[67] It is generally assumed – both legally and socially – that families have only two parents, and this can be seen as a reflection of 'couple-normativity', meaning the ways in which couples are valorised within society (Roseneil et al., 2020).

Extending these concepts to TNB parent families, TNB parents may be considered 'acceptable' if they conform to certain norms, such as being binary-trans, being of an 'acceptable' parental age, being part of a married two-parent family, and in a monogamous, relationship. Indeed, research on representations of trans parents in the media has shown that cisnormative representations have been expanded to include certain types of acceptable trans parents (parents who are 'just the same' as cis parents, despite a (binary) gender transition), a process that is said to further denote those who do not meet such standards of acceptability as deviant (Lampe et al., 2019). Such findings overall suggest that understanding the way in which normativities relate to the experiences of TNB parents themselves is important, as different parents may have different experiences of being perceived as 'acceptable' or not.

Intersectional approaches

As the discussion above has made clear, discrimination does not impact all TNB parents in the same way. Indeed, parents with several minority identities may experience discrimination on the basis not only of cisgenderism, but also racism, classism, and ableism. Additionally, parents may have different experiences depending on their family set-up and route to parenthood, demonstrating the importance of exploring the impact of multiple factors on parents' social experiences. It has therefore been suggested that TNB parenting is best conceptualised within an intersectional framework (Hafford-Letchfield et al., 2019) that attends to the ways in which individuals are uniquely impacted by multiple intersecting oppressions. Such an approach has been used to study how the privileged social location of parenthood (within a society which highly values parenthood) intersects with the stigmatised social location of being TNB (in a society that assumes that everyone is cisgender) (Haines et al., 2014; von Doussa et al., 2015). However, the intersection of other identities (such as ethnicity, class and dis/ability) have yet to be studied.

Data gathered from the US NTDS highlights that trans adults are less likely to be white, and more likely to be African-American, Black, Hispanic or Latino than are cis adults (Flores, Brown, et al., 2016). Moreover, the complex intersection between structural cisgenderism and racism has been found to be particularly difficult for trans people of color (Grant et al., 2011), but there is a lack of data on parents' experiences specifically. Within the US, disability has been found to be associated with an increased likelihood of being a parent in transmasculine communities, although multiple disabilities have been shown to decrease this likelihood (Walls et al., 2018). This study also found that (amongst transmasculine people) African American, Black and multiracial people were significantly more likely to be parents than their white counterparts (Walls et al., 2018). Elsewhere, Black, Asian and multiracial trans people have been found to experience higher rates of court interference in relationships with their children (Grant et al.,

2011). Higher income is also associated with the likelihood of being a parent with trans populations (Walls et al., 2018). Although interpreting some of these findings, particularly those relating to demographic trends, is challenging, this research overall suggests that understanding the ways in which the multiple identities of TNB parents intersect may be fruitful. However, to date the evidence relating to intersectionality has emerged solely from the US NTDS; there is a lack of research using qualitative approaches and focusing on experiences within the UK.

Therefore, despite TNB populations being described as "hyperdiverse" (Pearce, 2020, p. 13), most research on TNB people in general (and parents specifically) has focused on white, middle-class, non-disabled individuals (Vincent, 2018). It is clear that intersectional research is necessary in order to fully understand the experiences of TNB parents, who are evidently not a homogenous group.

Theoretical frameworks: interactionism and intersectionality

This study makes use of a number of theoretical frameworks: structural symbolic interactionism, theories of intersectionality and Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical approach to interaction. Structural symbolic interactionism (outlined extensively in Chapter 1) suggests that identities exist in, and are formed through, social interaction, and that societal structures can be seen as boundaries that impact identity development (Sheldon Stryker, 1980). SSI therefore explains the interrelationships between the individual, interaction and institution. In this framework, society is a "mosaic of relatively durable patterned interactions and relationships…intersected by crosscutting boundaries of class, ethnicity, age, gender, religion and other variables" (Sheldon Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 285). Beyond stressing the existence and interaction of multiple different boundaries on identities within society, SSI also conceives of identities as hierarchical, in that some identities may be more salient than others in certain situations, where salience is defined as the probability that a given identity will be invoked in social interaction (Brenner et al., 2014; Sheldon Stryker, 1968).

This 'hierarchy of salience' has been critiqued, in that it does not attend to the way in which *multiple identities* may be salient in interaction (De Vries, 2012). In this study, SSI is therefore employed alongside an intersectional framework to explore the interactions between multiple identities and oppressions.[68] Intersectionality was first proposed by Black feminist scholars, who noted that Black women were being excluded from feminist movements (that focussed on white women) and anti-racist movements (that focussed on Black men) (Bowleg, 2008; Crenshaw, 1991). Scholars highlighted the inaccurate assumption that gender could be seen as a

[68] Oppression is used here to refer to systematic discrimination in the context of unequal power relations, where the welfare of the dominant group (i.e. cis people) is prioritised and promoted, to the detriment of the non-dominant group (i.e. TNB people) (Weber, 2010).

unifying category (i.e. 'women'), instead noting that a person is not only a woman, for instance, but is a straight, white, middle-class, able-bodied woman (Crenshaw, 1991; West & Fenstermaker, 1995). In this way, gender cannot be studied without also taking into account identity categories relating to ethnicity, class, and ability (De Vries, 2012). Intersectionality therefore seeks to move beyond examining single axes of oppression (such as cisgenderism) to considering multiple axes of oppression, seeing the identities relating to these oppressions as 'both/and', rather than 'either/or' (Cho et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1991).

What does intersectionality actually do?

Intersectionality has rightly been recognised as a crucial contribution to feminist scholarship. However, some authors have suggested that it has also reached the status of 'buzzword', and is more often 'hastily referenced' than thoroughly explored (Davis, 2008; Nash, 2008, 2017). Moreover, while intersectionality at a conceptual level has been discussed extensively, what constitutes an intersectional analysis itself has been less discussed (Christensen et al., 2012). It has been argued that intersectional analyses involve exploring power relations – namely how categories (which can be recognised as socially constructed and fluid) are related to power (Christensen et al., 2012). Seen in this way, intersectional analyses enable the exploration of the socially constructed nature of categories and identities, and the ways in which sameness and difference, within these categories, relate to power (Cho et al., 2013).

A number of scholars have reflected upon different methodological approaches within the field of intersectionality (Choo & Ferree, 2010; McCall, 2005; Walby, 2007). McCall (2005) outlined three approaches to research: anticategorical complexity; intercategorical complexity, and the approach used in the present study, intracategorical complexity. Anticategorical complexity is a methodological approach that aims to deconstruct categories whereas intercategorical complexity is an approach that provisionally uses categories to demonstrate intersecting inequalities between different groups (McCall, 2005). Instead, intracategorical complexity is an approach that explores the experiences at one particular social location, and by doing so makes it possible to explore diversity and heterogeneity among the individuals occupying this social location (McCall, 2005).[69] This approach thus allows for an exploration of the ways in which oppressions manifest for individuals within the group under study at an interactional level. Indeed, SSI and intersectionality theory both signal the importance of researching so-called 'micro-interactions' as a means of elucidating the workings of social structures (David A. Snow, 2001).

[69] The intracategorical approach to complexity can be seen as being somewhere in between the other two approaches; it recognises the stability of, and therefore importance of, studying categories, but it also examines them critically and explores their inadequacy (McCall, 2005; Nash, 2008).

Intracategorical complexity: trans and/or non-binary parents

This study adopts an intracategorical approach to intersectionality, focussing on the group of trans and/or non-binary parents within the UK. Specifically, it explores the experiences of TNB parents who have identified as TNB since before having their children. By paying close attention to the everyday experiences of parents, the study aims to better understand the ways in which experiences are related to intersecting identities, and how this relates to privilege and oppression. Although all TNB parents may be privileged in their parenting identity, and marginalised by their gender identity (Haines et al., 2014), this approach allows for an exploration of the ways in which parents' other identities relate to their experiences within parenting spaces. Such an approach is evidently important when considering the diversity within TNB parenting populations and the numerous normativities that may be operating within parenting spaces.

In describing the strengths of the intracategorical approach, it has been suggested that this approach "reaffirms that there is an intrinsic value in deeply understanding the lived experiences of an under-represented group" (Vaccaro et al., 2020, p. 122). In contrast, others have suggested that attending to a single group at multiple intersections reduces intersectionality to 'diversity' and fails to recognise that studying marginalised groups may reproduce their 'otherness' in comparison to the 'standard' of the hegemonic norm (Choo & Ferree, 2010). It has also been argued that intracategorical approaches are prone to cultural reductionism, relying on identity categories without critiquing them (Walby, 2007). However, it is possible to overcome these potential limitations by recognising and naming the hegemonic norms that individuals are compared to, and by situating individual experiences within their sociohistorical context (Bowleg, 2008; Marques, 2019). Additionally, it is possible to combine the intracategorical approach with a critical approach to categories (Gillespie et al., 2012), seeing them not as discrete and fixed, but rather recognising that they are conceptual tools with which to explore the social world and its inhabitants.[70]

Termed the 'et cetera' problem (Cho et al., 2013), intersectional research in general has faced the challenge of how many categories to include in analysis. In this study, it was deemed important to include categories relevant to all individuals *and* those categories particularly relevant to parents. As Choo and Ferree (2010) have noted, there are a number of 'priority inequalities' that are explored within intersectional research. Expanding upon the idea of priority inequalities, this study seeks to explore 'priority categories' relevant to all people (defined here as gender, sexuality, race, class, and ability) and 'parenting categories' (defined

[70] This is in line with the thesis' critical realist approach, in that an intracategorical approach recognises that categories are important for individuals' experiences (McCall, 2005), and so it is important to critically engage with them.

here as age, family set-up, and route to parenthood). The parenting categories were identified due to their relationship to hegemonic ideas of the family as consisting of two acceptably aged (i.e. not too young or too old) parents with 'complementary' identities (i.e. a mother and a father) with biologically related children. By analysing experiences through an interactionist and intersectional lens, this study aims to explore the way in which priority and parenting categories are reproduced in social interaction, and how they therefore relate to the experiences of trans and/or non-binary parents.

Dramaturgical approach to identity

Another theoretical framework that holds relevance to this study is that of Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical approach to the self and social interaction. In *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman used theatre as a metaphor for social interaction, suggesting that individuals perform their social roles to an 'audience', such that the 'self' is a product of successful performances (Goffman, 1959). According to Goffman, 'successful performances', by definition, require that the audience recognise the self in accordance with its presentation. He further elaborates on this in relation to the idea of a 'working consensus', which refers to the way in which performer and audience work in collaboration in a situation, so that the performance can be considered successful for all involved. This perspective highlights the way in which social interactions are essential to the self, its development, and its expression. Also noteworthy is the fact that Goffman distinguished between the 'front stage' and 'back stage', the front stage being that which functions to exhibit a performance to an audience. The back stage, however, is where the performer can relax their performance without the gaze of the audience, and prepare for future performances.

Goffman's theorisation is therefore useful for conceptualising the way in which individuals navigate social interactions. It has been suggested that navigating the social environment may be particularly stressful for TNB individuals, in that they are in "heightened states of information control about their self-presentation" (Hammack et al., 2019, p. 11). In other words, given that social others may devalue the identities or relationships of TNB individuals, and that such individuals live in a society characterised by normativities, the members of this population are required to decide how and when to disclose their identity, a process that has been shown to be highly stressful.[71] Goffman's (1959) work has previously been used to study the experiences of TNB individuals and their family members (e.g. Nealy, 2017; Whitley, 2013), but has less often been used to study the experiences of parents specifically. His theorisation may be

[71] It has been noted that minority stress theory, which theorises the link between discrimination and mental health, is partially rooted within Goffman's work on stigma and impression management (LeBlanc et al., 2018)

particularly useful for understanding how parents navigate the social environment in the context of hegemonic assumptions about the family.[72]

Research questions

The present study therefore uses the theoretical frameworks of SSI, intersectionality and impression management to explore the experiences and identities of trans and/or non-binary parents within parenting spaces. Parenting spaces are defined here as any space in which parents may be perceived as a parent or otherwise on the path to parenthood – in essence, any space in which a parenting identity is made salient (Sheldon Stryker, 1980). The study asks two RQs:

1. What are the experiences of trans and/or non-binary parents in parenting spaces, and what strategies do parents use to navigate these spaces?
2. What is the relationship between parents' unique identities and their experiences in parenting spaces?

In the next part of this chapter, the methodological approach taken to answering these research questions is elaborated upon.

3.2: Methods

The method deemed best suited to answering the study's research questions was that of the semi-structured interview. Qualitative interviewing is a widely used method that allows researchers to understand and interpret interviewees' experiences through theoretical frameworks (Gaskell, 2000). Interviews are particularly appropriate for exploratory studies, as they allow the gathering of rich data on under-researched topics where standardised measures are not yet appropriate (Nathan et al., 2019). Semi-structured interviews involve the use of an interview guide, but also allow flexibility in terms of question order and the possibility of asking additional questions based on participants' answers (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2019; Nathan et al., 2019). Semi-structured interviews therefore offer the benefit of allowing the same topics to be covered with each participant, while also allowing for the exploration of participants' unique experiences.

Given the theoretical approach to this study, and the lack of research on TNB parents, a semi-structured interview was considered to be the most effective way to explore participants'

[72] Participants in Chapter 2 reported high levels of stress around disclosure management. There, Goffman's (1963) work on stigma was particularly useful in understanding the experiences of adolescents at school (i.e. of discrimination and bullying). However, the work on the presentation of the self (Goffman, 1959) is especially relevant to the study reported in this chapter. In particular, impression management fosters greater understanding of the findings relating to parents' use of different *strategies* in navigating plural normative environments (see p. 130).

experiences and identities. The sampling procedure, interview process, the study's participants and the analytic approach will be discussed below.

Sampling a 'hard to reach' population

Defining the sample universe

According to Robinson (2014), the first stage in sampling for interview-based studies is to define the sample universe. Specifically, this involves outlining the inclusion or exclusion criteria for the study. Given the lack of research that specifically looks at the experiences of TNB parents who have identified as trans and/or non-binary since before having their children (see also C. Brown & Rogers, 2020), it was decided that the inclusion criteria would include these parents only. Individuals who have identified as TNB prior to having children are likely to have younger children than those who have had children before identifying as TNB. Therefore, the age range of the children in the study was restricted to 0-10 years, also in order to accommodate additional components of the project involving young children as participants, and that are reported elsewhere.[73] Given that research on the journey to parenthood has generally focussed on TNB pregnancy, with a distinct lack of research on other routes to parenthood, there were no exclusion criteria with regards to parenthood route.

Participants were recruited via flyering (Appendix 5) the wording of which intended to reach as diverse a group of TNB parents as possible. For example, the flyer referred to parents using multiple labels (e.g. "non-binary, gender-fluid or gender-nonconforming parents"), to avoid any potentially eligible parents 'de-selecting' themselves (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015; I. H. Meyer & Wilson, 2009). Flyers also specified that parents may or may not have 'partner(s)', so that polyamorous parent families (polyfamilies) and single parents would feel welcome to participate. In terms of describing the criterion that parents identified as TNB prior to having children, the wording 'Have you identified as trans since before your child's birth?' was chosen.[74] Other options considered included 'did you transition before your child was born?' and 'did you come out before your child was born?'. However, these were judged to be unsuitable considering that members of the TNB population may or may not consider themselves to have transitioned; transition may take various forms and be of multiple stages; and outness may be seen as a continual negotiation process, rather than a simple in/out dichotomy (Orne, 2011). The wording of 'have you identified as trans since before your child

[73] This study was part of a wider project conducted at the Centre for Family Research which aimed to investigate the experiences of parents and children in TNB parent families.

[74] On reflection, the flyer wording could have been more inclusive of adoptive parents (e.g. 'since before becoming a parent'). Considering that adoptive parents (n=2) did take part in the study, it is not thought that this omission dissuaded parents from participating, although it is unknown if other adoptive parents de-selected themselves from the study as a result.

was born?' therefore allowed participants to self-select to take part in the study, rather than researchers deciding whether or not participants were 'trans enough' (Garrison, 2018). This is particularly important given the history of research on trans populations by cis researchers. Prior to its distribution, the flyer was reviewed and approved by Gendered Intelligence, the largest national charitable organisation aiming to improve the lives of TNB people in the UK.

Sample strategies

After deciding on the inclusion criteria, a sampling strategy was chosen. This study employed purposive sampling, which involves deliberately seeking out individuals who are rich in information and/or experience on the topic under investigation (Etikan et al., 2016; Patton, 1990). This approach is particularly suited to qualitative research on hard-to-reach populations (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). Populations may be considered hard-to-reach due to location (physical and/or social), vulnerability (due to stigma and any risks involved in taking part), and/or unknownness (i.e. populations for whom data on total number is lacking) (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015; I. H. Meyer & Wilson, 2009). As the existing literature makes clear, TNB parents occupy a marginalised social location and experience high levels of stigma, and there is a distinct lack of data on the overall number of TNB parents, such that this population may certainly be thought of as 'hard to reach'.

The use of online spaces has been noted as an effective recruitment strategy as it allows researchers to reach wider segments of the population and target recruitment more effectively than would be possible offline (Gelinas et al., 2017). Online spaces, including social media, blogs, and websites, have also played a large role in the development and growth of trans communities, with such spaces being important sites for both socialising and activism (Shapiro, 2004; Yeadon-Lee, 2016). Activism is made easier by the possibility of individuals and organisations in diverse geographical spaces communicating on these platforms (Shapiro, 2004). Therefore, online spaces were deemed an appropriate site to target participants. However, it has been noted that participants in hard-to-reach populations may mistrust research processes (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015), a challenge that is perhaps exacerbated online.[75] Therefore, including community organisations throughout the sampling process was considered an effective way to increase participant engagement and trustworthiness in the research (Bonevski et al., 2014). A number of organisations assisted with the recruitment process. Stonewall and Gendered Intelligence posted the study's flyer at regular intervals on both Twitter and Facebook.[76] Pride Angel, a co-parenting/donor connection site for LGBTQ+ parents,

[75] This is particularly relevant considering the problematic history of research on trans populations (as discussed in Chapter 1, p. 16).

[76] The flyers were posted on Twitter at monthly intervals over the course of more than a year, so that individuals who did not check their social media regularly would still see the flyer

included a link to the flyer in their e-newsletter. Stonewall and Gendered Intelligence also posted the flyer in private Facebook groups for TNB parents (including groups in different parts of the country) which would have otherwise been inaccessible to the researcher.

Alongside social media, a number of other purposive sampling strategies were used in order to reach a wide range of parents. Participants were asked whether or not they knew any other eligible parents, and if so, if they would pass on the details of the study to them.[77] In order to target participants who did not engage in online spaces, flyers were posted in queer bookshops in Glasgow and London. Preliminary findings from the study were also presented at two LGBTQ+ events (one academic and one non-academic), and one academic conference on trans pregnancy that was well attended by community stakeholders and members. Lastly, several fertility clinics in the UK were contacted to establish whether or not they had any TNB patients that they were willing to contact about the study.

Efficacy of sampling strategies

10 families, and 13 TNB parents within these families, took part in the study, and families who did take part were asked how they heard about the study. The most effective recruitment method was Facebook (n=4), followed by Twitter (n=2), and through word of mouth (n=2). One family was eligible for another study being carried out at the Centre for Family Research, and were then asked if they also wished to take part in the present study; and one family was recruited after having attended one of the LGBTQ+ events.

The strategies of posting flyers in queer bookshops and contacting fertility clinics were ineffective. In particular, of a total of 63 fertility clinics contacted, 61 clinics did not respond, and 2 clinics responded that they did not have any TNB patients.

Although notoriously challenging to calculate, it has been suggested that response rates from internet-based recruitment can be determined by comparing the number of individuals who contacted the researcher about the study with those who finally participated (Hamilton & Bowers, 2006). Twenty parents who initially contacted the researcher did not take part in the study: the majority (n=17) stopped responding to emails; some (n=2) did not meet the study's inclusion criteria; and one individual withdrew for personal reasons. Difficulty maintaining contact with prospective participants has been noted as a key challenge when sampling hard-to-reach populations (Bonevski et al., 2014). Indeed, although the reason(s) for non-participation cannot be known, it is possible that as part of a small and marginalised community, which is attracting increasing attention in research, TNB individuals may experience a number of study

[77] The strategy of snowball sampling is efficient, but potentially leads to a homogenous sample, rather than capturing a range of experiences (Hanson et al., 2019). Therefore, it was appropriate to use this strategy alongside a number of others.

participation requests (Ashley, 2021; E. C. Potter & Potter, 2020); it has been suggested that trans support groups and charities are saturated by participation requests from researchers (Vincent, 2018). Although prospective participants were advised that they could participate in as much or as little of this study as they wanted, it is possible that the study's demands were nevertheless too high, leading individuals to not participate due to 'research fatigue' (Ashley, 2021). Additionally, it is worth noting that prospective participants were all parents of young children, with potentially limited resources to begin with. Prospective participants were followed up via email twice after their initial message to the researcher. Although additional follow-ups (perhaps using alternative means) may have resulted in higher rates of participation (Bonevski et al., 2014), such an approach was avoided owing to ethical concerns relating to the need for prospective participants to freely consent to take part. Despite these recruitment challenges, 13 TNB parents, from 10 families, took part in the study.

Appropriate sample sizes within qualitative research have been the subject of much debate, but there is no strict rule about sample size (Nathan et al., 2019), such that scholars such as Gaskell (2000) have compared asking how many interviews should be conducted to asking the length of a piece of string. Some scholars have suggested that sampling should stop when 'data saturation' is complete, meaning when no new codes or themes are produced from gathering more participants (Braun & Clarke, 2019b). However, the concept of data saturation has been criticised for being unquestionably applied as the 'gold standard' of determining sample size, despite inconsistency in its conceptualisation (Saunders et al., 2018). Indeed, within this study the last two parents interviewed had somewhat different narratives to the previous 11 participants, in that they each engaged with the LGBTQ+ community to a lesser extent. Such findings highlight the complexities of data saturation, in that new information can be gathered unexpectedly. When also considering that the interpretation of data develops after data collection and coding, data saturation may be based on superficial impressions, and if knowledge is viewed as "the actively created product of the interpretive efforts of a particular researcher (or researchers), combined with the dataset, the concept of saturation stops making sense" (Braun et al., 2019, p. 851).

Given these complexities, the number of interview participants deemed sufficient for the present study was based on Malterud et al.'s (2016) notion of 'information power'. Information power is affected by the aim of the study (narrow or broad), the specificity of the sample (dense or sparse), the use of theory (applied or none), the quality of interview dialogue (strong or weak), and the analysis strategy (case or cross-case) (Malterud et al., 2016). Given the specific sample, strong interview dialogue, and use of existing theory, it was decided that a sample of 10

participants would be suitable for cross-case thematic analysis.[78] Therefore, the 13 TNB parents interviewed within this study represent an appropriate overall sample for thematic analysis, and allowed for extensive reflection on the experiences and identities of all participants.[79]

Participants

A total of 10 families took part in the study: within these families there were 13 TNB parents, 3 cisgender parents, and 4 children that took part in interviews. This chapter focusses only on the analysis of data collected with TNB parents. Data based on interviews with cis parents and children are reported elsewhere (see Bower-Brown, forthcoming).

In terms of the features of the sample, participants had a range of gender identities, including trans woman (n=4), non-binary, (n=4), genderqueer (n=2), gender fluid (n=1), trans man (n=1), and trans (n=1). Participants had used different routes to parenthood, including in-vitro fertilisation (IVF, n=5), unassisted conception (n=4), adoption (n=2), known donation (n=1) and step-parenting (n=1). Six participants had experienced pregnancy. Participants were part of a number of family forms, including single parent families, two-parent families, polyfamilies, and co-parenting families. Four participants had disabilities (including chronic illness, autism and sight conditions) and 9 did not. Five participants were experiencing financial difficulties, and 8 were not. All participants lived in England. Of the 10 participants who provided information about their ethnicity, 9 identified as white (including white British, white English and white Other); further demographic information, including the ways in which these various aspects of identities intersected for each participant, has not been provided in order to protect the anonymity of participants within the sample, given its size and nature.[80]

Procedure

Once participants had indicated their interest in the study, they were sent a longer flyer (Appendix 6) with further information about the study. Participants were able to ask questions, and were invited to choose a time and place of their choice for their interview. A participant-centred approach, which aimed to be as flexible as possible, was followed (Bonevski et al., 2014); the majority of interviews therefore took place in person (n=10): 8 of these took place at participants' homes, and 2 at the Centre for Family Research, at participants' request. Two

[78] In terms of thematic analysis specifically, Braun et al. (2019) suggest that 5/6 interviews is the lowest possible sample size for a research project.

[79] Participants were invited to review the findings, and gave positive feedback (see pp. 126-127 for further discussion) and this further suggests that the sample size was sufficient to obtain meaningful data.

[80] Decision making around anonymity can be seen as balancing the competing priorities of protecting participants' identities and maximising the value of the data (Saunders et al., 2015). Within this study, anonymity was prioritised; given that the TNB parenting community is small and, at times, hypervisible, inclusion of further information could make participants identifiable to others in the community. Additionally, a number of participants were themselves concerned about anonymity, hence the priority given to this.

interviews took place via telephone (at participants' request) and one was over Skype (during the COVID pandemic). The majority of interviews (n=11) were conducted by the primary researcher, and in families where more than one parent wanted to be interviewed at the same time, another trained researcher (SI, SF or KS) interviewed the other parent.

Before all interviews, participants were sent a copy of the information sheet (Appendix 7). At the beginning of in person visits, participants were given the opportunity to ask any questions before providing written informed consent.[81] Participants who took part in online visits were given the opportunity to ask questions over email before completing and returning their informed consent form by email prior to the interview.

The interview

Throughout the interview, different styles of questions were used to achieve 'within-method triangulation' (Flick, 2014; Gaskell, 2000). Some questions aimed to invite descriptions (e.g. 'could you describe your experience of pregnancy as a trans man/non-binary person?'), others asked for participants' perceptions of what others thought (e.g. 'what do you think the general public thinks about TNB people?'), while others still were closed (e.g. 'do you know any other LGBT+ parents?') and followed up with prompts (e.g. 'is that important to you? why/why not?'). In keeping with recommendations for questions that reflect the concerns and nomenclature of the group(s) under study (see Gaskell, 2000), extensive research on the language used by TNB parents was undertaken prior to data collection, as was trans awareness training[82], and participants' own language was adopted within each individual interview. Importantly, all interviewees were asked about their gender identity and pronouns and the gender identity and pronouns of other family members (about whom they would be asked questions), so as to avoid making assumptions about any individual's identity.

The interview schedule was informed by both the existing research and a number of theoretical frameworks (for a full list of questions see Appendix 8). For instance, questions relating to experiences of stigma and discrimination were informed by minority stress theory (I. H. Meyer, 2003), thus capturing participants' experiences of both proximal and distal stressors. Interviews began with general questions about participants' experiences of parenting, before focussing specifically on their experiences as TNB parents. The general parenting questions took the form of the Parent Development Interview (Slade et al., 2004), a measure designed to assess parent-child attachment relationships. Although the PDI was administered to address the aims of the wider project, this section was beneficial in inviting participants to speak at length about their child(ren), thus putting them at ease (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2019; Nathan et al.,

[81] One participant with a sight condition gave their verbal consent to take part.
[82] This was a training day called 'Introduction to Trans Awareness', run by Gendered Intelligence

2019). Additionally, some questions led participants to reflect on their experiences as a TNB parent; for instance, the question on anger ('do you ever feel angry as a parent?') was answered by some participants in relation to feeling angry about transphobia and/or ableist parenting spaces. Therefore, the interview transcripts were analysed in their entirety, but answers to the PDI that were not relevant to this study's aims were not coded.

After the PDI had been administered, questions focussed on participants' experiences on the journey to parenthood (e.g. 'did your transition/gender identity affect your desire to have children in any way?'[83]) and of related services (e.g. within pregnancy spaces, fertility clinics and adoption services). Questions relating to being a parent asked about participants' identities as TNB parents and their experiences of stigma and discrimination. Participants were also asked about how they discussed gender and their identity with their children, and the advice that they might give to other TNB people wishing to become parents. In closing, participants were asked whether or not there were additional experiences that had not been covered during the interview, and if they had any further insights they would like to be known.[84]

Scholars have noted the potentially 'normalising' process of an interview, in that interviews may invite participants to occupy particular social positions in relation to normativities (Alldred et al., 2012). In this study – of 'TNB parents' – many questions focussed on experiences relating to parental gender, which may have made participants feel that they were being positioned as the 'other'. Multiple strategies aimed at avoiding this. For example, questions were worded in a balanced way (e.g. 'do you think that you will talk to [child] about problems that they may face for having a trans parent, or is that an unnecessary conversation for your family?'), and the language employed throughout the interviews aimed to avoid reproducing certain assumptions: for example, gender-neutral words were used (such as partner, rather than wife/husband, and child rather than son/daughter). Participants' experiences of the interview process are described in detail below (see pp. 122-123).

Ethics in practice (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004)

This study received ethical approval from the University of Cambridge Psychology Research Ethics Committee. However, ethical approval is not the only criteria for an ethical study (Miller

[83] Although language referring to a transition is avoided in this thesis, it was used when speaking to some participants, in accordance with the language that they used.

[84] After their interview, some participants shared, via email, aspects of their experiences they had forgotten to mention or had further reflected upon after the interview. These were coded and included as data. Quotations taken from these additional insights in the Results section are identified as such.

& Bell, 2012) and ethical issues must be considered at each stage of the research process (Kvale, 2011a).[85]

In terms of ethics in practice, specific guidelines for researching TNB populations have been identified (Vincent, 2018); these include being aware of the history of research on TNB populations (see Chapter 1), making research motives transparent, paying attention to language, considering feminist methodologies, addressing intersectionality, and being respectful of spaces. It has also been noted that it is particularly important for cis researchers to be mindful of the impact of their own gender on the research process, and that such research risks being inconsiderate or inaccurate (Galupo, 2017; Rosenberg & Tilley, 2020). Further guidelines for cis researchers have therefore been suggested (Galupo, 2017), including collaborating with and citing research by TNB researchers, inviting input from TNB individuals at all stages of the research process, reflecting on the impact of cis identities on trans research, and particularly, recognising that all cisgenderist assumptions will not have been accounted for. These ethical guidelines were considered at all stages of the research process. In sampling, online spaces were respected by partnering with organisations with extensive knowledge of such spaces. Participants were not pressured to participate, and potential participants were told they could take part in as much or as little of the study as they wished. Given that it has been suggested that research fatigue may be more likely if participation involves multiple sittings or requires financial and cognitive resources for participation (such as travelling to the participation site) (Ashley, 2021), the study was participant-focused, with the researcher travelling at days/times and to places of participants' choosing, such that the cognitive burden would be low and the financial burden non-existent. Moreover, participants were remunerated for their time (£30 for each family, and a small, age-appropriate toy for each child), allowing participants with varying levels of economic and social capital to participate (Vincent, 2018).

TNB individuals and organisations gave input to the study at multiple stages: Gendered Intelligence approved the flyer, participants' suggestions were incorporated into the interview schedule, and participants were invited to review the findings of the study prior to them being published (see pp. 126-127). As discussed above, throughout the interview, researchers were mindful of language. All researchers received training in interviewing practices: researchers aimed to be sensitive to identifying participants' levels of distress and participants were told in advance of, and in some cases during, the interview that they could stop or take a break at any time without giving a reason. Participants were also told that if a question was not relevant, or if they did not wish to answer, they could move on without giving a reason.

[85] Guillemin and Gillam (2004) distinguish between procedural ethics (seeking approval from an ethics committee) and ethics in practice (ethical issues that arise throughout the research process).

Identity in interview

Although traditionally viewed as a passive absorption of information from interviewee to interviewer, interviews are ultimately an interaction between the interviewer and interviewee (Alldred et al., 2012; J. Potter & Hepburn, 2005; Zadeh, 2017). It is important to think theoretically and ethically about the way in which interviews are an 'inter-view', that is, a cooperative project between two individuals (Farr, 1982). Theoretically, this is relevant when considering the interactionist perspective of this thesis. Given that the thesis takes as its point of departure that identity exists within, and is shaped by, interaction, it is clear that the researcher's identity cannot be thought of as separate from the interactional space of the interview. Ethically, if an interview is seen as a cooperative project then it is important to reflect on the researcher's positionality and how it relates to the interview procedure.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the insider/outsider relationship between interviewer and interviewee has been extensively discussed in research, such that it is important to note that researchers are usually both insiders and outsiders (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Indeed, as a white, cis, queer, young, able-bodied, middle-class woman, I would have been seen as both an insider and outsider, depending on the interviewee and topic being discussed. Prior to their participation, some participants asked for further details about the study, and for information about why the study was being conducted. These questions were answered honestly, and the aims of the study shared with participants in the information sheet and in conversation. Some participants were especially interested in my involvement in the study, and with these participants I shared my queer identity.[86] Some participants also assumed my queer identity, as no attempt was made to conceal it ("So, like going to gay clubs was like, it's just, something in you just unclenches, doesn't it, because you don't have to explain yourself").

It is possible that, as a cis, non-parent, participants explained things more thoroughly to me than they might have otherwise. Such differences in the research relationship have been said to have the benefit of encouraging participants to share their experiences in their own words, without assuming common understanding (Duncombe & Jessop, 2012). On the other hand, in the present study, such differences may have meant that I misunderstood certain experiences (Rosenberg & Tilley, 2020) due to being less familiar with the 'local language' (Gaskell, 2000). To try and minimise this possibility, extensive research on language was undertaken prior to the research, and clarifications sought when aspects of participants' responses were to me unclear.

[86] For instance, one participant had enquired as to whether there were any trans researchers on the team, and I told them that there were not. At the end of the interview I clarified my own position further as a cis LGBTQ+ person who was doing the research as an ally.

Another way in which my identity impacted the interview was through my own awareness of the extensive history of problematic and traumatic research on TNB populations (Vincent, 2018). In seeking to instead conduct social justice research, I potentially did not probe participants' answers as often as I might have, so as to avoid asking any inappropriate questions or making participants feel uncomfortable. It has been suggested that deciding how far to probe difficult experiences can be seen as an 'ethically important moment' in research (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004), and in these moments I erred on the side of caution. For instance, in one interview I used the wrong pronouns to refer to the parent's child, who was trans. The parent corrected me, and I apologised and continued with the interview. However, for the rest of this interview I was aware of having made this mistake, and thus overall less relaxed.[87] This may have impacted the rapport built with the participant, and it also made me feel more reluctant to probe their experiences, demonstrating that an awareness of potentially being perceived as an outsider impacted my approach during the interview process.

It has been suggested that "reflexivity implies that before and after the event the researcher is no longer the same person" (Gaskell & Bauer, 2000, p. 345), and elsewhere that undertaking LGBTQ+ research as an LGBTQ+ person may lead to significant introspection for the researcher (Nelson, 2020). Indeed, this study did encourage me to reflect on my future ambition to be a parent, my non-academic role in the LGBTQ+ community, and my own experiences of gender. Firstly, as a queer person who wishes to become a parent in the future, I saw elements of what this future could look like in participants' stories. Before conducting the study, I did not know any LGBTQ+ parents personally, and seeing the way that participants encouraged gender fluidity and resisted gender stereotypes enabled me to envision my (future) self within participants' experiences. It also provided inspiration for the way in which I wish to parent in the future. For example, one participant spoke about dressing their child in both 'boys'' and 'girls'' clothes, and this made me reflect on the tendency for gender-neutral to be equated with masculine, and for femininity to be devalued (see p. 95). Secondly, throughout my PhD I have been involved within the LGBTQ+ community outside of academia, being an LGBTQ+ Officer at the University for 2 years. Conducting this study made me more aware of the way in which University LGBTQ+ spaces are more set up for cis individuals. Hearing the experiences of parents who felt excluded from LGBTQ+ spaces motivated me to examine the ways in which I could make the spaces I frequent more inclusive for all LGBTQ+ individuals. Thirdly, conducting the study made me consider my own experiences of gender and, in particular, the process of

[87] It has been noted that the researcher is too often portrayed as an emotionally neutral actor and that experiences of feeling nervous, whilst clearly impacting the interview, have been underexplored (Scott et al., 2012).

writing this thesis has made me reflect upon the extent to which I identify with being a woman. This is not something that I had previously considered, but is something that I will continue to reflect upon, and I am therefore grateful for the personal reflections that this study has prompted.

These reflections are shared here to demonstrate that the research process is not only shaped by the researcher's identity, but the researcher's identity may too be shaped by the research process. Discussion of the former is extensive, but discussion of the latter has been neglected (see Nelson, 2020 for an exception), and there has been a tendency for research focussing on the self (as in autoethnographic approaches) to be dismissed as lazy and/or self-indulgent (Javaid, 2020; Pearce, 2020). However, if reflexivity is to be taken seriously, then it is important that researchers reflect on all aspects of their research, including how their own identities/experiences and the participants' identities/experiences interact with each other in ways that are potentially consequential for both.

Participants' experiences of the process

Alongside reflecting on positionality, it is important to look at participants' experiences of the research process, so as to understand any benefits and disadvantages that result, particularly given that researchers experience tangible benefits from doing research (such as receiving a doctorate, or being published in academic journals) (Kvale, 2011a; Standing, 1998).[88] Potential benefits to participants may include the research being an opportunity to engage in valuable reflection, which may lead to personal insights; disadvantages may include the possibility of participants sharing more information than they had initially intended and/or feeling psychological/emotional fatigue from participation (Ashley, 2021; Duncombe & Jessop, 2012). These potential disadvantages indicate the importance of informed consent, and reminding participants throughout the research process that nothing is compulsory (Miller & Bell, 2012).

In the course of this study, a number of participants offered additional insights into their experiences, either at the end of formal interview itself, or in post-interview emails. All participants who provided feedback explained that they had enjoyed the interview (although those who did not may have been less likely to give feedback). One participant reflected on their experience of the research ("Thanks for the lengthy and thought-provoking and weirdly asymmetric conversation of earlier.") demonstrating that their interview had provided an opportunity for reflection, but was also acknowledged as having defied conversational norms of reciprocity.

[88] This is key when undertaking research with a commitment to social justice, due to the key aim of achieving outcomes that benefit the group being studied (see p. 22).

In addition to signalling having generally enjoyed taking part in the study, some participants expressed that participating had changed their perception of being the only TNB parent:

> Participant: I don't think there's many trans parents, I mean, I don't know, I don't know, maybe there's fucking loads I've no idea! I can only imagine there aren't any. I mean have you guys been around, gone round many in the UK?
>
> Susie: Yeah gone round a few, but yeah not loads, but a few. You're the 9th family we've seen.
>
> Participant: Oh ok, oh that's more than I thought to be honest.

Another participant noted that finding out about other parents was a source of support:

> Susie: It's great to just talk to lots of different parents and hear everyone's experiences so thank you for telling me all about yours.
>
> Participant: Thank you for telling me that they exist! That's great for me to know, these imaginary hoards will come support me now in my imagination.

Such excerpts suggest that participants potentially benefitted simply from the knowledge they gained through participating in the research that other TNB parents exist, These insights also, however, suggest that the lack of research on, and representation of, TNB parents has limited the extent to which parents may feel supported in their experiences, thus further highlighting the importance of doing research on under-represented groups (Vaccaro et al., 2020).

Data Analysis

The dataset was analysed according to the principles of reflexive thematic analysis, a subtype of thematic analysis that holds researcher subjectivity and reflexivity to be central (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019a). This approach was justified on several grounds. Firstly, given the intersectional approach to the study, and its symbolic interactionist underpinnings, an analytical approach that emphasised the subjectivity and reflexivity of the researcher was deemed most appropriate. During the process of indication (Flick, 2014), interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was also considered (Smith et al., 2009). IPA aims to provide "detailed examinations of personal lived experience" (Smith & Osborn, 2015, p. 41) and is idiographic, inductive and interrogative (Smith, 2004). IPA aims to understand, on a case-by-case basis, the meaning-making undertaken by individuals around a certain experience or event (Smith et al., 2009). Such an approach would be useful for examining, for example, the transition to parenthood among TNB parents. However, insofar as IPA is used to examine personal lived experiences, it is most suited, theoretically speaking, to a phenomenologically grounded approach. Thematic analysis is more flexible, in that the method can be used with research from

a range of theoretical perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As outlined previously, this study takes a structural symbolic interactionist approach, its aims being to explore the relationship between identities and social experiences among TNB parents using an intersectional framework.

Additional reasons for employing reflexive TA rather than IPA relate to the level at which conclusions from the study were intended to be drawn. While IPA can be seen as "strongly idiographic" (Smith, 2004, p. 41), meaning that it involves a detailed analysis of each case individually before comparing across the cases, reflexive TA instead focusses on constructing themes across the sample, as themes make it possible to see shared meanings in data that may initially appear different (Braun et al., 2019). SSI and intersectionality theories make the case for understanding experiences at a group and individual level; therefore, reflexive TA was deemed most appropriate. Moreover, given the social justice commitment of this research, thematic analysis was considered advantageous as it produces data that is well suited to non-academic reports, whereas IPA does not. In short, instead of focussing solely on individual meaning-making about experiences, this study has the broader aims of understanding the experiences and identity processes of TNB parents, and of disseminating the information gained in different ways, which is more suited to a thematic than a phenomenological approach.

Reflexive TA

The first stage in reflexive TA is to become familiar with the data (see Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion of each step). In this study, data familiarisation was achieved through transcribing (8 interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriber, and 5 interviews by the researcher);[89] re-reading transcripts and noting initial ideas for coding. The next stage involved line-by-line, open coding of the data using Atlas.ti (Friese et al., 2018). Coding was primarily inductive, in that the analysis was data-driven, although of course coding does not occur in a theoretical vacuum, and the researcher's theoretical orientation will have had an impact (Braun et al., 2019). Both semantic and latent aspects of the data were coded. Semantic codes (such as 'avoidance of uninclusive spaces') capture explicit meaning whereas latent codes (such as 'erasure') capture implicit meaning. Some codes were not relevant to the RQs (e.g. 'child chose parental name') and thus were not included in theme construction, but for the full list of codes (including relevant/non-relevant codes), see Appendix 9. Once 10 interviews had been coded,

[89] Although transcription is a large part of the study time-wise, it is often under-examined (Oliver et al., 2005). Researchers have noted that transcription is selective and reflects theoretical goals (Kvale, 2011b; Ochs, 1979), and while Braun and Clarke's (2006, p. 36) criteria for good thematic analysis suggests that the data need to have been "transcribed to an appropriate level of detail", what this means is unclear. In this study, all spoken utterances and non-spoken utterances (such as 'um' or laughing) were transcribed (Gaskell, 2000). Potentially identifying information was omitted. Transcripts were also 'tidied up' before data presentation (see p. 125).

initial themes were constructed. This theme construction process involved examining the list of codes, highlighting codes that seemed similar and then reflecting on the patterns underlying their similarity. The final three interviews were transcribed and analysed as and when participants were interviewed. The themes were revised and reviewed throughout the analytic process, and involved going back and forth between the interview transcripts, the codes, and the emerging themes.

It has been suggested that the use of multiple strategies (both creative and methodical) during analysis can allow for further insights into meanings within the data (Gaskell, 2000). In this study, during the process of theme creation, a number of visual representations of the themes were created, and short summaries of individual participants' experiences, identities and strategies were devised, which is a strategy used within thematic coding (Flick, 2014). Additionally, codes and themes were discussed with an experienced qualitative researcher throughout. This process of 'peer debriefing' allowed for a reflexive space for discussion of the data and the emerging themes (Flick, 2014).

Alongside writing up being a stage of analysis in itself (as discussed in Chapter 2, see also Smart, 2010) when using interview data, the writing up process also involves making decisions about how to present participants' data, with implications for how participants are perceived by others. Previous research on this topic has shown that some participants in qualitative studies believe that tidying up transcripts makes the data 'untrue', whereas others think that including verbatim speech portrays the speaker as unintelligent or unreasonable (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006). However, it is clear that the specificity with which participants are quoted should relate to the aims of a study: here, language was seen as a medium for studying its *contents*, rather than speech itself being the object of inquiry, as in conversational analysis (Flick, 2014). Moreover, when verbatim speech is presented alongside heavily edited academic writing, it can seem especially out of place. From an ethical standpoint, such verbatim quoting potentially reinforces the power dynamic between researcher and researched (Standing, 1998). The 'tidying up' of transcripts therefore ensures readability while still conveying the meaning (Poland, 2001). As a result, a balanced approach to data presentation was taken – punctuation was added, utterances were generally retained and repeated words and filler words (e.g. 'like', 'you know', 'kind of') were 'tidied up'. Importantly, transcripts were tidied up after the completion of the analysis, so as to not change the meaning of the text (Poland, 2001) during this phase. Pseudonyms were also provided for all participants, and confirmed/amended by participants in the process of communicative validation (see below).

Quality assessment

As in Study 1, the quality of this study was assessed according to Gaskell and Bauer's (2000) criteria of confidence and relevance (discussed extensively in Chapter 2, p. 58). At all stages, from study design, sampling and data collection, to data analysis and communication, the study was conducted systematically and reflexively (Mays & Pope, 1995). In order to ensure transparency and procedural clarity, the methods have been described extensively, so that other researchers would be able to follow the same steps, should they wish to do so. Systematic note-taking was undertaken throughout the process (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Flick, 2014). In addition, reflexivity remained key throughout all stages of the research process, and the strengths/limitations of the methodology and my insights on reflexivity and positionality have been discussed at length.

Differing from Study 1, this study presented the opportunity for participants to validate the findings of the study, thereby allowing further confidence in the interpretation of participants' social realities (Miller & Bell, 2012). So-called communicative validation can also be seen as a means to allow participants to further share in the construction of the data (Rosenberg & Tilley, 2020) and is therefore an important tool within social justice research. Additionally, being a cis researcher, it was deemed especially important to ask the TNB participants of this study to share their reflections about its findings. Indeed, it has been suggested that asking participants to review findings has benefits, in that they may be able to see experiences shared among others (Harper & Cole, 2012). However, it has also been suggested that this approach may place a burden on participants, in asking for further participation without further remuneration (Miller & Bell, 2012; Standing, 1998). With these issues in mind, participants were informed that reviewing study findings was optional and would not affect their participation. In order to lessen the potential burden of doing this, in addition to being invited to review the findings in full, participants were also offered the option of reviewing a summary of the findings and/or their quotations only.

Seven participants opted to review the findings in full (N=6) or a summary of the results (N=1).[90] All those who commented on the themes and findings indicated a positive response, thus providing further confidence in the findings. Some participants offered minimal feedback to indicate that they were happy with the inclusion of their own quotations. Others commented that they liked the research and/or that they felt seen by it. One participant suggested that some

[90] Specifically, participants were invited to review the findings in the format of the journal article on the findings of this chapter (Bower-Brown & Zadeh, 2021). The journal article was written based on a subsample of the participants in the thesis (11 parents rather than 13 parents) due to the timings of the special issue the article was included in, and so 11 parents in total were offered the chance to review the findings. However, all participants were invited to check they were happy with their pseudonyms and the quotations that were included in the thesis.

of their experiences had not been sufficiently represented (given their experiences of pregnancy services in another country), but expressed satisfaction with the accuracy of the study's findings overall. A few participants made some suggestions for minor revisions, such as clarifying the meaning of specific quotations, which have been included. Of course, the bias of omission means that participants who perhaps felt less satisfied with the research may not have responded to the call for communicative validation, but the positive nature in which several did respond adds confidence to the results.

In addition to these member checks, findings were presented at a trans pregnancy conference, and at two LGBTQ+ events, and were also subjected to the process of peer-review (of an article written on the findings; Bower-Brown & Zadeh, 2020). Therefore, multiple groups of people, both community members and external reviewers considered to be experts in the field, reviewed the findings of the study.

Confidence and relevance criteria were also met in the presentation of the data; in the results section, thick description was achieved by including rich quotations and examples from participants' experiences (Gaskell & Bauer, 2000). Where data were potentially surprising, this has also been highlighted rather than omitted, or otherwise side-lined.

3.3: Results

Three main themes and 10 subthemes were identified that together answer the RQs (Table 5). In brief, participants suggested that parenting spaces were reflective of a 'highly normative world' (Theme 1), and therefore that they used the strategies of 'being a pragmatic parent' (Theme 2) and 'being a pioneering parent' (Theme 3) to navigate them. As indicated in Figure 4, the relationship between these strategies was found to be characterised by tension.

Themes	**Subthemes**
1. Parenting in a highly normative world	a. assumptions b. being an outsider c. gender binary
2. Being a pragmatic parent: negotiating norms and balancing identities	a. disclosure negotiation b. (space) avoidance c. detachment d. erasure
3. Being a pioneering parent: changing and constructing spaces	a. precarity and tension b. isolation/ connection c. time

Table 5: List of themes and subthemes that were identified in participants' interviews

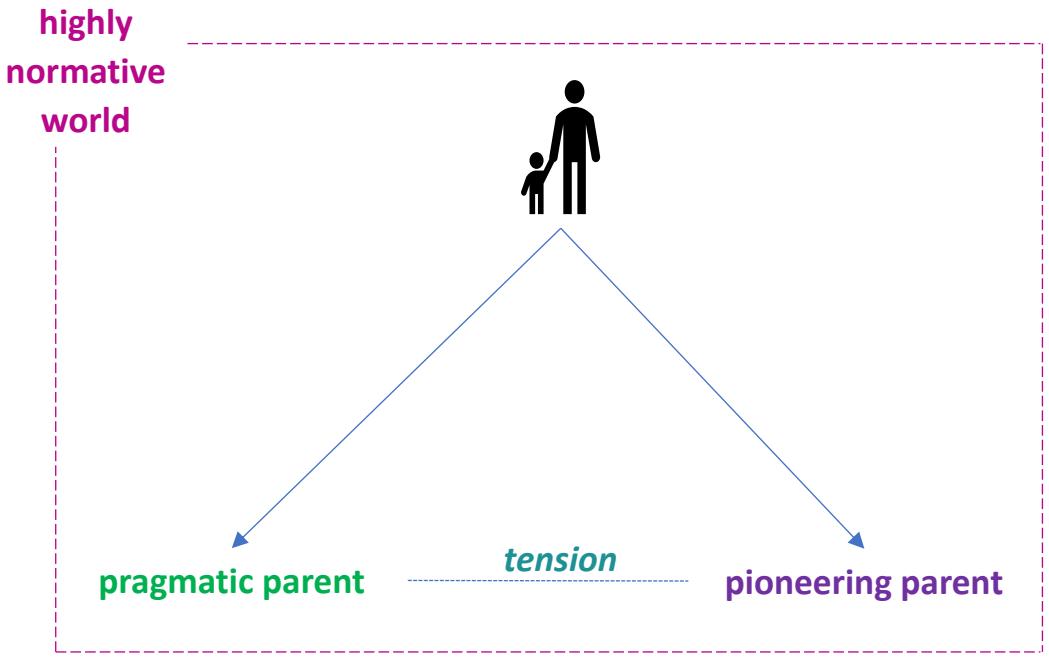

Figure 4: Thematic map depicting interrelated themes identified in interviews with TNB parents

Summary of themes

Theme 1 (Parenting in a highly normative world) captures findings that participants experienced parenting spaces as being characterised and governed by a number of normativities. These normativities related to the priority categories of gender (identity and expression), sexuality, ethnicity, (dis)ability, and the parenting categories of age, family-set up and number of parents. This theme therefore addresses both research questions by highlighting participants' social experiences and their relationship to their unique identities. It includes the subthemes of 'assumptions', 'being an outsider', and 'gender binary'.

Theme 2 (Being a pragmatic parent: negotiating norms and balancing identities) captures the ways in which participants limited the disclosure of their identity in certain spaces, or avoided certain spaces, due to negative experiences (actual and/or imagined) within these spaces. Using this strategy, participants therefore emphasised their parenting identities and reduced the salience[91] of their gender identities, thus enabling them to move through discriminatory spaces without being subject to social disapproval. However, although allowing participants to move through uninclusive spaces, participants also noted feelings of frustration and erasure associated with this strategy. As per Theme 1, this theme also addresses both research questions, highlighting the presentation strategies used by participants, and the ways in which these relate to their unique identities. It includes the subthemes of 'disclosure negotiation', '(space) avoidance', 'detachment' and 'erasure'.

Theme 3 (Being a pioneering parent: changing and constructing spaces) captures the ways in which participants both aimed to change uninclusive spaces, and construct new environments free of cisgenderism and other damaging oppressions. Participants described pioneering through uninclusive spaces, thus drawing attention to the normativities in operation, and improving such contexts for themselves and for others going forward. However, this position was also characterised by precarity and isolation, such that participants highlighted the importance of allies and connecting with others in the success of this strategy. Moreover, participants consistently highlighted that home was a space in which all family members (including their children) could enjoy the benefits of being in a TNB parent family. As per Theme 1 and Theme 2, this theme answers both research questions. Its subthemes are 'precarity and tension', 'isolation/connection' and 'time'.

All of the themes are interconnected: the findings suggest that the experiences outlined in Theme 1 necessitate the strategies outlined in Themes 2 and 3. Tensions between being a

[91] Salience is used here in reference to the notion of the identity salience hierarchy in SSI (see p. 37), where an identity's salience depends on how often the identity is invoked in different situations (Sheldon Stryker, 1968). Here, participants reduced the salience of their gender identities in certain situations by de-emphasising its importance to themselves or others.

pragmatic and pioneering parent (i.e. between Themes 2 and 3) were experienced in different ways by different participants, and depended upon participants' unique identities. Such tensions will be explored in depth below. It should also be noted that it was not possible to categorise individual parents as either 'pioneers' or 'pragmatists': participants tended to use one strategy more than the other, but evidence of both strategies existed across most participants' stories. Finally, within each theme, the subthemes are strongly interlinked, and so are discussed together.

Theme 1: Parenting in a highly normative world

This theme describes the way in which parenting was considered by participants to be both a "highly gendered world" (Max) and a highly normative world, meaning that that parenting spaces were constrained by norms that seemed to relate to both priority categories and parenting categories. Some parents found their experiences to be as expected, but others were surprised by the degree of cisheterosexism they encountered within such spaces:

> Being a person is really gendered in our society, and being a parent is even more gendered in our society…being a non-binary person prepared me really well for being a non-binary parent I think. (Charlie)

> I didn't expect that my gender identity and sexuality would be a barrier to my children getting support from GPs or health visitors. I didn't think that that would be a thing. (Max)

On the journey to becoming a parent, participants who had been pregnant described pregnancy spaces as "completely taken over, dominated by cis bodied women" (Amal). In describing how "support networks and breastfeeding support and toddler groups and baby groups and hospital, anything, it was all very much mums and women" (Jemma), participants discussed the ways in which such spaces may be governed by cisnormative assumptions and thus unsuitable for TNB parents. The study's participants included a number of trans women who became parents due to their partner/co-parent becoming pregnant, and they expressed feeling excluded during pregnancy due to heteronormative assumptions about families:

> It wasn't put like 'this is the space for people giving birth', it was 'this is the female space', right? And the male space is sitting by the side of the bed and not being comfortable and staying out of the way and not using any of the facilities and just being invisible, and then that made me feel really, really sort of anxious. (Lil)

> It would have been nice before the birth when all these medical things were happening for it to be less of a medical setting… I don't know if it would be normally the mother and father would go in the room and have these discussions, but because we weren't [co-

> parent]'s partner we were never invited and there was never an assumption that we would be shared in that. (Kim)

Assumptions about families as consisting of two cisgender, heterosexual parents were therefore described as impacting upon participants' experiences in pregnancy spaces. These assumptions were also described as having impacted upon participants' experiences within fertility clinics. For example, Nora and her partner decided to undertake IVF with Nora's sperm, but explained that the clinic repeatedly made cisnormative assumptions:

> When it came time for our first round, one of the nurses there, she said 'oh well you haven't signed the donor form so we can't pick out the donor sperm' and we said 'well we've got our own, we don't want you to put the donor stuff in' but she completely missed the point, and was really, really unfriendly. So that was a fairly awful situation.

Another participant, Kim, described being denied treatment in a fertility clinic due to a number of factors, including disabilities, being in a multi-parent family, and being trans:

> The first clinic we went to rejected us for what we considered to be spurious grounds, that would probably break the Equalities Act… we felt it was a little bit eugenic to be honest. (Kim)

Kim's experience should be understood within the historical context of sterilisation against trans and non-binary people (Dunne, 2017) and the extensive history of sterilisation against people with disabilities (Rowlands & Amy, 2019). These findings also suggest that cisheteronormativities may have particular consequences in settings that are characterised by vast power imbalances, such as when clinicians are able to make decisions about whom to offer fertility treatment. Kim noted that discrimination by the clinic "wasn't specifically aimed at the transness of us, but that was kind of included, because it was a bit weird and there was other weird things going on, it was just too much", highlighting that multiple normativities were operating at once.

Much like those who had pursued fertility treatment, participants who pursued adoption also described the ways in which cisheteronormative assumptions had underpinned their experiences:

> Max: There was definitely a lot of like authorities that wouldn't place with us because of us being in a civil partnership… and also my gender identity was quite a feature of concern for a lot of local authorities.
>
> Susie: How did that play out, what kind of experiences did you have, of transphobia and homophobia?

> Max: Well, so umm certain authorities told our social worker that there was no point in putting us forward for their children, because they would never agree to it. And then also um there was a potential match, before we were matched with these ones, but they said that we, essentially we, [were] offensive to the foster carers and so that couldn't go ahead…our adoption ended up being a contested adoption which was horrific.

This prioritising of others' feelings about participants' identities in the adoption system was also experienced by Charlie, a non-binary parent:

> Just experiencing a lot of transphobia from social workers and family finders. Like some explicit, some not explicit. So like, there was one profile that was like "this child requires a mother and a father" cos that's what the child is used to. The child was 18 months... And there would be people who would be really interested in me and really positive about me, and then find out I was trans and suddenly not be interested.

Such experiences were described as extremely difficult ("It was eviscerating, to be honest. Yeah. But also, like, quite shit-ly unsurprising" (Max)), particularly when involving many rejections:

> Why are they saying no? Is it because they found a better match, or is it because it's me? And particularly the ones where you knew they were rejecting you and still family finding for that child. So it's like…we'd prefer the child to not have a parent than to have me as a parent. It's quite personal, personal rejection. And it was just repeated like literally hundreds of times. (Charlie)

These experiences highlight participants' difficulties in navigating a pervasively cisgenderist adoption system. Charlie also described their specific experience of being a non-binary adopter:

> There were social workers that I spoke to that… said 'oh it makes sense to me if you thought you were a man but you're actually a woman, but like I just don't get this non-binary stuff'. (Charlie)

Such findings echo other research on non-binary people (Darwin, 2020), in that non-binary identities were described as misunderstood or ridiculed: "if you're non-binary you're this 'silly teenager' that's looking for attention" (Finn). Max noted that the adoption process involved being "hammered into this hole that didn't really fit", thus capturing the lack of societal acceptance for diverse families on the journey to parenthood.

In contrast to experiences of adoption, one parent became a step-parent after starting a relationship with their partner:

> Jules: [Parenthood was] never something that was on my horizon. And I don't know whether that, on reflection, is because I didn't want that or I didn't think I deserved that, I actually think it's probably I didn't think I deserved that.
>
> Susie: Mm, and why do you feel you that you maybe felt that you didn't deserve that?
>
> Jules: Ugh, typical trans person self-loathing.

This interview exchange suggests that some TNB individuals may not be able to imagine parenthood for themselves, here seemingly due to internalised transphobia (von Doussa et al., 2015). It also demonstrates the importance of researching parents who have used different routes to parenthood – including step-parenthood – as distinct experiences were found to characterise different routes.

Participants also noted feeling excluded once they had become parents, in part due to existing societal narratives of 'mothers' as ideal parents:

> [Be]coming a parent has really brought me into contact again with like a huge amount of quite painful cisgender policing really, and so I have felt, I've sat in a lot of quote unquote "mother and baby groups" and felt like massively othered. (Max)
>
> As a trans parent, I think it's a whole feeling like a second-class citizen, my opinion just doesn't [count] for anything, I'm a second-class citizen, second class parent, I'm at the back of the queue. (Jules)

Complementary to societal norms about the 'essential mother', fathers have often been assumed to be less competent to undertake day-to-day parenting (Doucet, 2011). Relatedly, participants who were trans women described often not being recognised in their identities, but rather being seen as fathers, and consequently, being excluded:

> I didn't get very much maternity leave, because I was only entitled to paternity leave, which was a big downer, especially when I'm trying to breastfeed [child]... They said 'oh because you're down as father on the birth certificate, it came down to that'. (Erin)

Such findings suggest that trans women (as non-birth parents with birthing partners) may be "lumped in with the men ... where they're like 'oh no, you don't get involved, you sit down'" (Lil). Moreover, these experiences evidence the wide-ranging issues with lack of appropriate provision for TNB parents in birth certification (White, 2018). This is particularly noteworthy given that, in contrast to Simpson's (2018) study, in which all trans women participants

identified as fathers, in the present study trans women identified as mothers, or "parents as opposed to mums or dads" (Kim).[92]

In contrast, non-binary parents spoke of facing different issues, in that social contacts were "just about willing to believe that binary trans people are real, [but] understanding that you could be trans but not be a man or a woman is almost too much" (Jemma). For several participants, this was described as having led to feelings of invisibility:

> You don't see families like yours on television, there's not cards for like 'Happy Non-Binary Parents' Day' and that can be difficult, just feeling like you don't exist. (Finn)

This is consistent with other findings of erasure for non-binary parents (Fischer 2020). Robin, a trans man, spoke about finding it difficult to align his male gender identity and pregnancy:

> Now I've got this whole other way in which I'm unusual, and I even feel less valid sometimes umm in the trans male community..there's kind of a weird flexing amongst trans men of what proves your transness or what makes you manly and that kind of thing, and yeah, people talk about things in ways that are quite exclusionary sometimes and stupid.

Robin also described receiving an "admiring look that people tend to give to single dads, umm, who are giving their baby a bottle". Participants' experiences here therefore demonstrate that societal assumptions about men not experiencing pregnancy/breastfeeding and more generally not being 'involved parents' impact trans women, trans men, and non-binary people who are parents in different ways. The identities of trans women may be denied on the assumption that being labelled 'father' on the birth certificate implies less involvement than does the label of 'mother'; trans men may experience difficulties in being perceived as a pregnant man and/or an involved male parent; and non-binary parents may feel that their identities are invisible, both legally and socially. Such findings highlight the importance of looking at multiple levels of gender (that is, at institutional, interactional and individual levels) and across different groups, perspectives and experiences (that is, not simply considering 'TNB parents' as a unitary category).

A number of participants spoke directly about the ways in which different identity categories were experienced as impacting upon each other. For example, Kim, described the double standards of acceptance of co-parenting:

[92] One participant was unsure about how they were planning to refer to themselves.

> Susie: And in your experience do you think that co-parenting is generally acceptable in society or not?
>
> Kim: Um, co-parenting as we're doing it – no, because it's got all these weird, queer trappings. Co-parenting in terms of couples who are no longer together, I think that's very widely acceptable.

This interview exchange attests to the fact that participants felt their familial situations to have been viewed differently because of their non-adherence to heteronormative frameworks. Homonormativity was also found in participants' experiences:

> In her class at school there's a girl with lesbian mums, but because they are married it's kind of seen as a no [big] deal. Where often I'd have my then boyfriend and girlfriend with me at parent groups, and people would just assume my girlfriend was my sister and stuff like that, they just wouldn't think outside the box. (Ali)

Such findings demonstrate the impact of the potential acceptance for married, two-parent LGBTQ+ families, but not for other LGBTQ+ families, to the further exclusion of TNB parents who are seen as 'non-normative' in multiple ways:

> It's mostly about my presentation, I think, that is looked at in a very suspicious way. And I usually undergo some kind of exam before umm, my children are allowed to invite or be invited for playdates…I guess the trans identity goes with other minority identities. I'm a stranger, I have a different accent, I have a different history, I dress differently, I professionally am in an unclear situation, and also the way I present doesn't really match all this. (Yanniq)

Yanniq's experience also highlights the way in which 'normality' is assumed by adherence to hegemonic family norms. Similarly, a number of participants also spoke about others' assumptions of parents as able-bodied:

> I get annoyed that the parents in her class don't seem to get that you can be disabled and a parent…and I'll often wear a lot of pride based stuff. And you can just tell they're talking amongst themselves. (Ali)
>
> I've had mental health problems, I've had physical health problems and I'll see things posted on the internet and on Facebook about how disabled people shouldn't have children. (Finn)

Disabilities were found to make participants' access to certain parenting spaces hard, both in terms of physical fatigue due to chronic illness and fatigue due to autism (autistic fatigue):

> Like baby groups and toddler groups…a lot [of them] you leave the buggy and you walk up a massive flight of stairs and that flight of stairs might take all of my energy out of me. (Jemma)

> It would be really, really important [to socialise with other trans parents], but I don't see how to do it any practical way that works for a family of five, for my family of five anyway. And because of the autistic issues I have, I don't have much energy to socialise in general. (Yanniq)

Lack of provision for parents with disabilities therefore affected participants' experiences, and in particular, their engagement with certain parenting spaces. Participants also noted that other resources determined their ability to access inclusive spaces; such spaces were costly ("the fertility clinic I went to, that was expensive" (Robin)), or otherwise inaccessible ("we went to an LGBT friendly specific clinic…it was a 2 hour drive" (Erin)).

However, the findings also indicate the complex relationship with 'normality' for TNB parents, which has been so far unexplored. As has been previously noted, trans parents may experience parenting as a "normalising social location" (Haines et al., 2014, p. 239). Notably, though, some participants experienced such 'normality' as a challenge insofar as it required them to be involved in worlds that they had previously avoided:

> In terms of being a parent, this is the most vanilla thing I've ever done, it's the most heteronormative thing I've ever done, and it's the thing I'm getting the most shit for. And in some way that really strikes me. It's like, to get married and have children is just so (pause) usual….and it is seemingly the most problematic for a lot of people who extol the virtues of this system. So, there is some comedy to be had there. (Max)

> I have a bad relationship with my family of origin and so, they didn't understand that choice [to become a parent], they saw it as a way to normalise my life, and so in that way they welcomed it, and I resented that, of course. But in a way it's true. (Yanniq)

Theme 1 therefore captures the many ways in which participants found themselves having to engage with certain spaces that were explicitly unwelcoming, or which had been created and continued to operate without recognition of their existence. This theme also captures participants' experiences of being held up to certain standards based upon priority categories and parenting categories, and the finding that their experiences appeared to differ depending on the extent to which they deviated from certain norms.

Theme 2: Pragmatic parent: negotiating norms and balancing identities

Some participants were found to limit disclosure of their identity or to avoid certain parenting spaces – negotiations they deemed necessary due to a lack of acceptance of family diversity. Theme 2 therefore captures the pragmatic strategies that participants used in uninclusive spaces.[93] The strategy of being pragmatic was identified in the analysis as being more readily available to some participants than others, and in particular, most available to those who were perceived as part of a 'suitable family' based on the criteria described within Theme 1. Theme 2 therefore outlines the impact of problematic assumptions about parents on the strategies that TNB parents used to navigate highly normative parenting spaces.

Participants generally described negotiating disclosure of their identity such as by being "quite fussy about who knows" (Ali). Explained as a means of avoiding discrimination, participants noted "deciding when it's safe to let people know, or when it's relevant, is a big aspect of my life" (Jemma):

> Some of the people that I've met, like the parent friends, the school gate friends, some of them I haven't come out to cos [child] really likes their kids…there's always a decision to make about whether or not it's gonna be safe. (Charlie)

> Generally I don't tell people unless I think it's worth telling them. Like if I was just in Tesco and someone asked, I wouldn't bring it up because you just don't know. (Kim)

Charlie and Kim's experiences demonstrate the caution that several participants took in coming out to people who were either not close (seen as 'not worth it') or too close (seen as 'too high stakes').[94] Additionally, some participants explained that the strategy of disclosure management was possible due to how others perceived them:

> It's not a positive thing for us to pass as cis, but to be able to look like a kind of 'standard family', or a 'standard couple', meant that people didn't really question it. (Jemma)

Relatedly, Robin noted that "people don't doubt my ability in the way that they would if I had a mental illness or if I was disabled, or if I was a person of colour, or if I was non-binary perhaps", highlighting those privileges that allowed some parents to move through parenting spaces

[93] Pfeffer's framework of normative resistance/inventive pragmatism has been used to understand the experiences of cis female partners of trans men and of TNB conception (Pfeffer, 2012; Riggs et al., 2020). Some instances of inventive pragmatism are noted with this theme, but there are also differences between these frameworks that will be expanded on.

[94] This finding is perhaps surprising when considering that previous research with queer people has noted that close social contacts are "worth the investment of engagement" (Orne, 2013, p. 242). On the other hand, as detailed above, TNB parents are negotiating not only their own needs, but also their children's needs.

without disclosing their identity. However, as Robin acknowledged, this was not necessarily found to be the experience of other parents:

> Being in the community I am in…I don't actually know other brown trans people…and that's very isolating. And I know when I go out in this area, people are confused by me, and that's very isolating as well. (Amal)

Amal's experiences of isolation and being met with confusion demonstrate the impact of whitenormativity, what another participant described as the "very limited representation of…trans and non-binary people who aren't white" (Charlie). [95] Charlie also explained that, as a non-binary parent, pragmatic strategies that would work for binary-trans parents were not appropriate for them:

> The advice that [organisation] were giving was to minimise references to trans-ness in my profile, in my paperwork, cos that's worked for other trans adopters… whereas that just doesn't work for me, cos like the pronouns you throw out, at a really basic level. (Charlie)

Such findings therefore demonstrate that the strategy of being pragmatic was more available to some participants than others, and that the non-binary parents in this study used different strategies to those of the binary-trans parents interviewed. This is not to suggest, however, that binary-trans parents made the decision to use such strategies easily, as demonstrated by Lil's experience of deciding not to take certain steps in her transition:

> [Misgendering] doesn't feel good…I'm quite a logical person, and I've made that decision for ease of experience of life, safer to not be out around loads of different people, at the moment at least. I don't then get really upset when it happens, but it's not nice, and it feels like it would be much better if I could just be myself.

Strategy use was therefore influenced by a number of factors. Jemma, for example, found that, as a young parent, their age necessitated a pragmatic strategy around their gender:

> There was quite a lot of focus on me being very young, so that it was almost easier not to mention being non-binary and like (pauses) transness as a whole. (Jemma)

Jemma's feelings of being unable to disclose their gender identity should be understood in relation to stigma around young parenthood (Conn et al., 2018), demonstrating that for some of the participants in this study, 'being pragmatic' was felt to be more of an inevitable consequence of restrictive norms than a deliberate choice. Such findings are therefore in contrast to Pfeffer's

[95] Whitenormativity refers to "the unconscious and invisible ideas and practices that make whiteness appear natural and right" (Ward, 2008, p. 563) and it has been noted that this is common in LGBTQ spaces (Ward, 2008).

(2012) framework of inventive pragmatism – inventive implies a notion of choice around being pragmatic, which contrasts with participants' experiences here.

In addition to disclosure negotiation, participants described pragmatically avoiding certain spaces due to anticipated stigma. When deciding upon their route to parenthood, for instance, a number of participants were found to have avoided adoption because "when you adopt…there is so much checking of people…when you give birth to a child, nobody really checks if you're qualified" (Jemma), echoing other research on fears of discrimination in adoption among TNB parents (A. Goldberg et al., 2020; Tasker & Gato, 2020). One participant stated that these expectations resulted in their rejection of several routes to parenthood:

> If I went through the adoption route or surrogacy I would be subjecting myself to systems that weren't designed for me, and would potentially be quite scary and unpredictable and might just reject me outright. (Robin)

Another participant (with a trans ex-partner) described initially pursuing IVF treatment, but having been asked a number of inappropriate questions:

> 'How would you explain to a child that they've been conceived by donor sperm?'… 'How would you explain to a child that you're blind?'…And they were like at one point, 'Is there any chance you could be pregnant?' And we just glared at them going, 'He has no penis! Which part of that haven't you quite grasped?' (Ali)

After this experience, Ali decided to "cut out the medical side of things", thus reflecting a choice constrained by the dual cisgenderist assumptions about reproduction and ableist assumptions about parenthood.[96] Other systems of oppression were also found to impact upon participants' choices for parenthood, as described by Yanniq in terms of social class:

> If you come from a working class background, because you have a much, much narrower set of options…you are vulnerable. So it's easier to be in relationships that somehow provide you with a role that is easily recognisable by others. (Yanniq)

Yanniq's experience highlights the intersection of class and family set-up, and demonstrates the complexity of participants' decision-making around the route to parenthood.

In addition, some participants described having avoided reflecting upon other people's thoughts about TNB parents ("Um, I haven't really given it much thought to be honest. I think you know maybe if I thought about it I might see something I didn't want to see. Ha, try not to think about it." (Nora)). Participants also described avoiding certain spaces once having become parents due

[96] This decision to avoid medical spaces has been found in other research on TNB pregnancy (Fischer, 2020; Light et al., 2014)

to their lack of inclusivity ("I have a little bit of reticence of going to things for other parents because they have expectations about 'oh so who's the dad'" (Kim)). Additionally, being a parent was described as having made some participants more wary of transphobia – Amal explained that trans people were seen as:

> …something to be feared and avoided at all costs. Which is fine, leave me the hell alone, that's fine. I'd rather leaving me alone, you know, crossing the road, avoiding me completely, than saying things to me. Especially when I'm with my son.

Participants also described having to make difficult decisions around balancing their own identity and parenting approach, particularly given that their children may be exposed to unsupportive others:

> I don't always use neutral pronouns, I do sometimes use he/him…I don't really want to have a long conversation about using gender-neutral pronoun…I don't want [child] to have to be affected by that. (Finn)

> Cos I had a good relationship with my grandparents, it's important for [child] to have a good relationship with her grandparents. So I bite my tongue a lot with them. (Ali)

Participants' opportunities to express and experience their identities were therefore found to be limited within certain spaces, but such spaces were nevertheless entered for their children's benefit. This is in line with previous research which suggests that TNB parents often prioritise their children's needs, rather than their own identity (Haines et al., 2014; von Doussa et al., 2017). When asked about the most challenging part of being a trans parent, Nora spoke about tempering her reactions to transphobia for her children's sake:

> I think it is trying not to react to other people's prejudices if you go out in public, so it might be a person that maybe doesn't say anything but gives you a filthy look or something. If I was on my own, I would just rock up to them and give them shit. But because your children are with you, you've got to just sort of keep quiet about it.

The frustrations associated with keeping quiet in the face of prejudice were described as being difficult somewhat differently by Max:

> I've always been really out and very activist…now I'm a parent I don't really want to get arrested again, so a lot of my techniques that were pre-parent aren't really applicable and I have kind of struggled with how to interact with these issues at the same time as not being arrested.

Therefore, being pragmatic was found to be frustrating in multiple ways, as participants did not see a way to successfully integrate their pre-parent identities and parenting identities:

> The intensity of mental energy and social skills that are required to sustain healthy poly/glasnost relationships (especially long-term ones) becomes increasingly unaffordable, especially if children (and particularly biological children, I think) are entered into the equation. (Yanniq, post-interview email)

Feelings of frustration were expressed by Jules in a different way, as they explained that they pragmatically managed their identity so as to accommodate other people, given public perceptions of TNB people:

> I think the general public, particularly in the last couple of years, [think] these trans people are really bloody annoying, they're militant. I think cis people, straight people, whatever, anything other than trans people are probably awkward and don't even know how to start a conversation with a trans person…which is why I'm so relaxed about what people want to, call me what you will, whatever makes them comfortable. (Jules)

In addition to strategies of negotiating disclosure and avoidance, participants, and specifically birth parents during pregnancy, were also found to use strategies of detachment. Due to others' expectations of pregnancy as a "very female coded thing, that someone will look at you and just think you're a woman" (Finn), participants described having difficult feelings ("my body became to my own eyes an unequivocally female body, and I found myself unable to cope with that" (Yanniq)), and consequently focusing on their body's function during pregnancy:

> I suppose the way I dealt with my pregnancy was by not thinking about this pregnancy, as this body being a woman's body. This is more of a body that is carrying a child…I got very scientific with it, these are mammary glands meant for feeding a child. These are not in any way female, these are mine. (Amal)

This approach to pregnancy, although described as being "very, very difficult to do" (Amal), was described by participants as allowing them to navigate pregnancy spaces more easily. For Robin, pregnancy additionally complicated his social experiences relating to his gender identity:

> Before it felt quite uncomplicated, like I'm just a guy and people understood that. And now I'm like, I'm a dad but I gave birth, and maybe I don't quite have the confidence to state that completely openly. (Robin)

Such findings demonstrate the potentially unique experience of trans men who are pregnant. However, Robin also noted that conceptualising pregnancy as entirely pragmatic did not fully capture how he had come to think of it:

> I remember feeling that when I gave birth to [child] that I needed to find a way to fit that in to my identity, rather than try and kind of dismiss it or minimise it as just a purely physical or pragmatic thing…it meant that we had this bond that otherwise we wouldn't have. (Robin)

This contrasts with the findings of previous research in which TNB pregnancy has been conceived of as 'purely pragmatic' (Charter et al., 2018). Similarly, Lil noted that having to be pragmatic in pregnancy spaces was inherently problematic:

> But that in itself, not mentioning it for ease, is a bit of a worry, right? Like that it was easier to not mention it and just be uncomfortable every time we had to go to the midwife, than it was to mention it and have that support.

In general, participants who were pragmatic in the face of exclusionary spaces described feeling frustrated and ultimately erased, suggesting that this strategy, although perhaps effective, did not allow them to experience their gender and parenting identities in the ways they would have liked:

> There were times when I was upset because someone didn't use the right pronouns, but I didn't make an effort to make them use them or make them say them, which I think was more frustrating for myself than for other people. (Jemma)

> You're in a really difficult situation as an adopter who's family finding cos you can't piss off the social workers…yeah, it was really hard, just like keeping on going and keeping on going and facing constant rejection and discrimination. (Charlie)

Theme 3: Pioneering parent: changing and constructing spaces

In contrast to strategies that were broadly analysed as examples of pragmatism, being a pioneering parent is theorised as involving participants' aims to change uninclusive spaces to be more accommodating of family diversity, and/or construct their own spaces free of damaging norms. Indeed, some participants explained that deciding to become a parent in the first place was a pioneering move:

> The beginning of the adoption process was the first time I felt, we're doing something different to the other queer people that we know…I hadn't understood the nuances of what we were doing in terms of how it would impact our queer community. (Max)

On the journey to parenthood, a number of participants described aiming to improve uninclusive spaces:

> I just remember getting really annoyed and going through the entire pregnancy file thing they give you and crossing out anywhere it said mum and writing parent in like black sharpie pen, trying to get the point made. (Ali)

> We had to ask [the clinic] to change some of their forms actually because on their forms the sperm donor form to fill in it has [the] father's signature on it, and well you know that's not necessarily true. (Nora)

Among some participants, pioneering through uninclusive spaces was described in relation to precarity:

> It can sometimes feel like a really vulnerable situation to be in, knowing that there are people who loathe people like me and don't want me to be able to parent. And, particularly because I haven't got the adoption order yet. (Charlie)

For Charlie, this experience of adoption therefore extended beyond the adoption placement process, due to adoption specific vulnerability:

> It's that really difficult line to walk of wanting to provide [child] with what [child] needs and sort of being led by [child], and being responsive to [child]'s explorations and expressions, but also not wanting to piss off the social workers and then risk the chance that they or the judge might say no to the match. (Charlie)

Other participants, such as Max, noted that feeling precarious as a parent was also related to class ("I have known what it is to go hungry as a child and I don't really trust the structures and trappings of middle-class-ness that seem to have grown around me" (post-interview email)). However, other participants described feeling motivated by these intersections of oppression:

> I don't really know of any other [South Asian] trans people, least of all parents. So if I get myself out there, there's going to be someone else who sees me and goes 'that person looks like me' … I consider myself to be a trans parent in more than one way, not just to my son, to younger trans people. (Amal)

> [My child] sits at the intersection of a lot of really complicated and marginalised identities…So I want to do all I can to prepare them to face those challenges and to also try and change the world so they don't have as many challenges. (Charlie)

In addition to findings of the importance of intersectional understandings as a being a motivation for pioneering strategies, participants also noted the "burden on gender divergent people to be educators" (Max) and a "pressure to be a 'model minority'… can't get anything wrong otherwise you're letting down all non-binary parents ever" (Charlie). This can be further

understood as an expectation of performance, and the stressful nature of impression management (Goffman, 1959). Moreover, for some parents, being a pioneer was not a choice, but felt more like an imposed social status:

> Everyone questions you on every single level, and it feels like a very personal thing I think, asking someone about their sexuality, their gender. I feel like I have to overshare with almost complete strangers and I don't really want to, but I have to. (Jules)

Such findings highlight that while some participants seemed to take pride in being a pioneer, for others, it was more burdensome. A number of parents also noted the tensions between pioneering and pragmatism:

> I think to everybody I mentioned 'oh I use they/them pronouns' and they didn't know what that meant, or did and took it on board and then immediately forgot about it or didn't know how to deal with it. So generally it became easier just to not even try to get people to understand that… I wouldn't want something to happen to [child] because these people had some sort of prejudice against me. (Jemma)

> There's some playgroups we go to locally that are run by churches, and one of them's particularly evangelical, and I know that technically speaking, with the kind of church that it is, it isn't welcoming of someone like me…And when I'm feeling strong or whatever, I just think well fuck you, we come and enjoy this anyway. But at the same time, I do think about it. (Robin)

As these quotations demonstrate, experiences of such tensions varied over time. Discrimination during the journey to parenthood, in particular, led some parents to consider alternative (pragmatic) strategies[97]:

> At one point I did think 'oh I'm such a drag on the ticket'. Maybe my wife should be assessed as a solo adopter and then she could get children and I could be their parent just by stealth essentially. (Max)

> We actually said that it was me as a single parent, and [co-parent] as a sperm donor. Because we knew that they wouldn't have a problem with that. (Finn)

> Because we'd had a bad experience, we then censored ourselves a little bit [in IVF counselling] um, we treated it as 'no, this is a test we have to pass' rather than a counselling that we benefitted from, which wasn't the best approach to counselling. (Kim)

[97] These quotations can be seen as an example of Pfeffer's (2012) inventive pragmatism, in that participants attempted to work around systems that were not designed for them.

Kim's experience, in particular, demonstrates that discrimination may make some parents more likely to be pragmatic. In contrast, some participants described feeling that they grew in confidence once having become parents; Jemma explained that they felt "much more willing and comfortable in saying 'I am a trans parent, I'm not a mum, I'm not'".

Participants additionally explained that their experiences of 'being a pioneering parent' could be socially isolating ("in [child]'s school…nobody talks to me" (Amal)). In the face of feeling isolated, participants noted the importance of social support, both in terms of family and friends ("having people like my spouse, who understands what it is to be like myself and having other queer people…it's very, very important" (Amal)) and support groups ("we like taking [child] to all the different trans events that we go to…it's given us that support network that we were lacking before" (Lil)). Importantly, some participants expressed that LGBTQ+ parenting spaces were not inclusive of all LGBTQ+ parents; Jemma reported that "being young was a barrier", and Erin stated that the local LGBTQ+ parenting group was "almost entirely lesbian couples. So we go to that, and we still manage to feel like the odd ones out".

Participants also varied in the importance they assigned to connecting with other TNB parents ("if you're a nuclear family…everyone knows what your family looks like and it's nice to get a taste of that now and again" (Finn)). In contrast to Finn, some participants did not deem such connections important ("yeah I suppose it would be good, just haven't, it's just laziness I suppose" (Nora)) and one parent explicitly described not wanting to socialise with other TNB parents ("I don't like the segregation of it. You know, a parent is a parent. You're looking after a child, no matter if you're black, white, transgender, cis." (Jules)).[98]

Some participants noted the key role that allies played in allowing them to pioneer through uninclusive spaces. Notably, both of the adoptive parents interviewed spoke about the importance of allies in allowing them to continue through the process:

> [The adoption agency have] put a lot of extra resources into supporting me cos they're having to do many more applications than normal…They arranged for all of the people on my adoption panel to go to trans awareness training. (Charlie)

> We met quite a lot of homophobia and transphobia along the way at every stage, and but then also we had a social worker who very much championed us and I think was a really protective factor. (Max)

[98] These differing levels of engagement with LGBTQ+ communities, which may not always be captured in research that samples through queer spaces, attest to the importance of the present study's use of multiple recruitment strategies.

These quotations evidence the vital role that supportive 'insiders' can play in allowing TNB parents to navigate the adoption system in particular.

A number of participants also spoke about how pioneering through uninclusive spaces to become a parent was "worth it" (Lil), and that prospective TNB parents should "just do it" (Nora), "not tak[e] what bigots say to heart about their ability to parent" (Kim). As Amal explained,

> If you took away everything else in the universe and it was just you making the decision to be a parent, if the answer is still yes, do it. Do it, sod everything else basically. As a trans person you're gonna deal with a lot of nonsense in your entire life…Don't let things stop you, because then, if you did that then you wouldn't have ever come out.

Such findings highlight that, despite engaging in highly uninclusive spaces, the majority of participants felt that the positive experience of being a parent outweighed these more challenging experiences.

Once having become parents, participants varied in their ideas about parenting, and some participants spoke about other aspects of their identity being important to their approach, such as their political identity ("being very left-y" (Erin)), or personality and interests, including being "a bit nerdy" (Kim) and "more scientist based" (Nora)). With regards to gender, all participants recognised that they wanted to allow their children to be free from gender stereotypes:

> There's no toxic masculinity in this house, he's allowed to have his emotions, he's allowed to be upset. There's no manning up… and we wear nail varnish in this house because we're fabulous. (Amal)

> I've tried quite hard not to force my daughter to have pink things or dollies…but yeah as soon as they start primary school and other influences come in they become programmed quite strongly there and they sort of say 'I want pink things, I want dollies now.' (Nora)

Nora specifically stated that she "applaud[ed] people who are able to bring up a child to be gender neutral", and Erin spoke about attempting to normalise this for other parents:

> Importantly, we try and generally not to tell people [child]'s sex, we're using they…we quite like to normalise doing that, so that other parents feel they can do that and have the choice and it's not a big thing. (Erin)

Indeed, all of the participants in the study resisted and challenged normative conceptions of gender and sexuality with their children, albeit in different ways. As Jemma described, "when you drop the hang ups of what gender is supposed to mean, children experience more and

flourish more". Based on these findings, and in addition to their social experiences, participants should also be viewed as pioneers in their own homes, in that they aimed to raise 'gender-literate' (Pyne, 2013) children:

> The way men straight men, cis men are brought up, it's not always good for them, it's that whole thing men aren't supposed to express emotion, they're not supposed to like pretty things, and I don't want [child] to feel like 'I can't enjoy looking at flowers and butterflies because I'm a boy', I think that's rubbish. (Finn)

Ultimately, in contrast to much of the societal rejection experienced by parents themselves, participants aimed to provide love and acceptance for their own children:

> I sincerely hope that if you are identifying in any way along the gender spectrum or on the queer spectrum you would become more accepting of your child, whoever they become. (Amal)

> We know he's gonna be accepting and open to everyone, no matter who they are. And hopefully he's gonna be open to figuring out who him, who he is himself… I would have loved to have had trans parents, because that would have probably twigged myself to things so much quicker. (Lil)

3.4: Discussion

This study focussed on interpersonal dynamics (David A. Snow, 2001) and adopted an intracategorical analytical approach to intersectionality, which made it possible to explore the ways in which oppressions were manifested for individuals at a particular social location (McCall, 2005). The findings therefore offer a unique exploration into TNB parents' experiences and strategies within UK parenting spaces. Findings highlight that participants' experiences within parenting spaces were characterised by a number of normativities relating to certain priority and parenting categories, such that they were judged, and treated, according to whether or not (and the extent to which) they adhered to/deviated from these norms. Findings also evidence the strategies employed by participants to navigate parenting spaces, namely being a pragmatic parent and being a pioneering parent, and the tensions between the two that were often experienced.

The findings from this study will now be discussed in relation to both the extant empirical research and the theoretical frameworks relevant to this study. Firstly, the findings relating to interactionism and intersectionality will be discussed, exploring the usefulness of combining these theoretical frameworks. Here, findings will also be discussed in relation to other relevant frameworks, including performativity (Goffman, 1959) and family display (Finch, 2007).

Subsequently, the findings of differing experiences for parents with different gender identities will be discussed and this will be followed by a presentation of the study's limitations, strengths, key implications and conclusions.

Identity in interaction

This study's findings suggest that TNB parents undertake a complex negotiation of their identities, thus corroborating existing research findings on the balance taken by TNB parents when managing expression of their identity with concerns about their family's safety (Haines et al., 2014; von Doussa et al., 2015). The present study extends this research by identifying the strategies of pioneering and pragmatism, and the tensions between them. Strategy tension can be understood using the theoretical perspective of SSI, where SSI refers to the way in which identities (i) exist within interaction and (ii) are constrained by existing social structures. At an interactional level, participants' identities were often either explicitly denied or erased, and therefore pioneering strategies represent individual attempts to ensure identity visibility, despite the potential of increased discrimination. Pragmatism rather represents an attempt to protect the self from discrimination, and was found to lead to feelings of frustration and erasure, in that parents' identities were not displayed in interaction. The tensions between pioneering and pragmatic strategies can therefore be seen as a negotiation between the expression and protection of identities.

Pragmatic and pioneering strategies can be further conceptualised using the concept of the hierarchy of salience, which suggests that more salient identities will be invoked more often, and that this is dependent on societal norms and values (Sheldon Stryker, 1968).[99] Despite gender being an identity category that is generally high in the salience hierarchy, being TNB and being a parent were sometimes seen as conflicting identities, due to societal assumptions of parenthood as a role that is undertaken by those who are cisgender. Seen through the lens of SSI, by reducing the salience of gender identity (either for themselves or others), participants who used pragmatic strategies were more able to navigate uninclusive spaces than were those who did not. However, gender *was* a salient identity for participants (because it is invoked in practically all situations) and it is therefore perhaps unsurprising that such strategies were found to be potentially effective in the short term, but damaging to the self in the longer term. The tensions identified between pragmatic and pioneering strategies demonstrates a fluid and changing conceptualisation of identity, in that all participants were found to use both types of strategies, according to circumstances. Additionally, the finding that strategy use was not static,

[99] Stryker (1968) gives the example of an interaction between two men who are both brothers-in-law and colleagues; he suggests that the familial identity will more likely be invoked when an individual exists in a society which is more kinship-orientated than work-orientated.

but rather changed over time, suggests that that future longitudinal research exploring changes in TNB parents' identities and strategy use may be of both theoretical and empirical value.

The present study's findings also highlight the variability with which TNB parents may involve themselves in in the LGBTQ+ community, with implications for strategy use. Again interpreted using the concept of identity salience, Stryker (1968) suggests that there is a hierarchy of salience, and that identities are higher in the salience hierarchy when there is more 'commitment' to them, where commitment is defined as the extensiveness and intensity of relationships associated with that identity. It seems that parents not involved in the LGBTQ+ community may have fewer social relationships that relate to their gender identities, and therefore potentially lower levels of commitment. The findings therefore demonstrate that these parents may be more likely to use pragmatic strategies, and those with higher commitment will be more likely to use pioneering strategies. Such findings reinforce the fact that it is important to explore the experiences and identities of all TNB parents, regardless of their engagement with the queer community. At present, researchers often assume that being TNB will involve engaging with LGBTQ+ communities and activism[100]; future research should therefore aim to include parents who engage with the queer community, extensively, partially and not at all.

What has intersectionality actually done?

The findings of this study add weight to the idea that the experiences of TNB parents may be best understood using an intersectional framework (Hafford-Letchfield et al., 2019). This study used an intracategorical approach, focussing on the experiences of one specific group (TNB parents in the UK) and disentangling the influences of difference categories upon their individual experiences (McCall, 2005). It is clear that such an analysis has allowed for a deeper understanding of the experiences of TNB parents than might otherwise have been possible. In particular, the findings of this study seem to suggest that some TNB parent families are perceived socially as 'acceptable' and others are not, with such perceptions being based on a number of different norms. Such insights complement the research of Lampe et al. (2019), which suggested that media representations portray certain trans parents as acceptable and intelligible (namely those represented as 'just the same' as cis parents, aside from being (binary) trans). Notions of acceptability are indeed useful for interpreting this study's findings. Importantly, the ways in which participants were perceived was found to impact upon their strategy use, with those deemed 'acceptable' in certain spaces more able to use pragmatic

[100] This is related to the concept of 'coercive queering', where "self-identified heterosexual people who have 'trans' life experiences or an intersex body are conflated with lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer individuals" (Riggs et al., 2015, p. 34).

strategies, and those belonging to multiple minorities (including sexual, gender and ethnic minorities) more motivated to use pioneering strategies.

These findings are also related to existing conceptualisations of homonormativity (Duggan, 2002), insofar as some LGBTQ+ individuals may be 'acceptable' to society given their conformity to other norms (e.g. marriage and monogamy). It is worth highlighting that the multi-parent families in this study (including co-parenting families and polyfamilies) described having been often not perceived as a family, a finding that echoes prior research on the experiences of polyfamilies (Pain, 2019; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2009). Multi-parent families that are the result of parental separation are now widely acceptable within society, particularly if they conform to other norms (e.g. couple norms, monogamy and heteronormativity; see Roseneil et al., 2020), thus demonstrating the intersection of multiple normativities that impacts the experiences of TNB parents. Such findings, and such insights, further attest to the importance of examining the intersection of multiple normativities in family research generally.

It has been suggested that intersectional analyses can utilise everyday experiences of interaction to explore the way that categories relate to power (Cho et al., 2013). Although definitions of power are contentious, it has been suggested that one way in which the concept can be defined is as relating to having (or not having) the ability and resources to make choices (Kabeer, 1999). In this study, participants were found to have often been denied the ability to make choices, particularly on the journey to parenthood. Of particular concern are findings relating to experiences of rejection in fertility clinics and with adoption services. Although these routes to parenthood differ in a number of ways, they are similar in that prospective parents are judged by 'experts' on their suitability for parenthood. The findings of this study would suggest that power is enacted against TNB parents in these spaces, insofar as cisgenderism, heterosexism, ableism and discrimination against multi-parent families were each used as reasons for not proceeding with fertility treatment and/or adoption procedures. The findings of this study support those of previous research, which has found that TNB parents may not challenge inappropriate care for fear of services being denied (James-Abra et al., 2015) and it is clear that extensive changes are necessary (see implications below).

Another way to examine the findings relating to variability in experiences in this study is in terms of resources, including reproductive resources (i.e. gametes), economic resources and social resources.[101] Findings suggest that TNB parents who have reproductive resources, and can therefore pursue biological parenthood outside of formal services, may have more positive

[101] Bourdieu highlights multiple forms of capital (economic, cultural, and social) that together determine the position someone occupies in society (Bourdieu, 1986; Wacquant, 2006).

experiences. This was due to being less often required to spend time in uninclusive settings, and being able to avoid being judged on their suitability as parents. Such insights echo the findings of previous research (Charter et al., 2018; Fischer, 2020; Riggs et al., 2020). Those lacking reproductive resources and economic resources may be more often required to engage in uninclusive spaces (e.g. fertility clinics that are not LGBTQ+ friendly). Social resources were also important, and the findings suggest that individuals impacted by multiple oppressions had more negative experiences. For instance, it has previously been suggested that whiteness (as an institution) functions within trans spaces (Vidal-Ortiz, 2014) and representations of gender-diversity are commonly white (Skidmore, 2011). This contextualises the findings of this study, which suggest that TNB parents who also belong to ethnic minorities may feel particularly isolated. Additionally, participants with disabilities experienced ableism within multiple parenting spaces. It should be noted that economic and social resources are linked; this can be seen when considering the pay gap between disabled and non-disabled individuals (ONS, 2019), and the increased rates of poverty and unemployment in disabled trans people compared to non-disabled trans people (S. E. James et al., 2016). In this way, the interconnections between disability, economic position and gender are clear. These factors demonstrate the usefulness of examining participants' resources as they relate to multiple domains.

Performativity and display

The findings can be interpreted using Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective. The strategies of 'being a pragmatic parent' and 'being a pioneering parent' are arguably examples of impression management strategies, in that they each reflect ways in which participants managed others' perceptions of them. Using Goffman's approach, some parenting spaces can be seen as 'front regions' in which participants' found their behaviour to be judged on the basis of societal expectations of parents, and thus managed the ways in which their identities were perceived accordingly. Perhaps the most significant front regions were those in which participants were considered in terms of their suitability as parents (e.g. IVF clinics, adoption services), wherein audiences had the power to decide whether or not to facilitate participants' paths to parenthood altogether. In cases such as these, 'successful performances' required participants to perform in accordance with the audience's cisheteronormative views of parents' roles, thus meaning that participants faced extensive rejection and discrimination.

Also relevant here is the concept of "putting out feelers" (Goffman, 1959, p. 121), referring to the process of testing out – in the context of social interaction – whether such an interaction is safe for an individual to act authentically, or whether extensive impression management is required. The participants in this study seemed to 'put out feelers' across multiple settings, and the conceptualisation of social interactions as an ongoing performance/rehearsal cycle is

therefore useful. The importance of 'back region' settings (including participants' homes and/or queer spaces) is also worthy of note; the findings suggest that such spaces are crucial, and that without them parents are particularly vulnerable, not least to the stresses involved in continual impression management (Hammack et al., 2019).

An interesting feature of the present findings is that participants also reported impression management at a familial, rather than individual, level. Goffman understood this process using the notion of 'teams', which can be defined as "a set of performers who co-operate in presenting a single performance" (Goffman, 1959, p. 50). For instance, in this study, parents often made decisions about navigation strategies together with their partner(s)/co-parent(s). Such findings can also be further understood using 'family display' (Finch, 2007). Family display refers to the notion that families do not simply 'do family practices', but that families must display themselves as a family, essentially displaying "this is my family and it works" (Finch, 2007, p. 70).[102] Finch (2007, p.71) also notes that, "the need for display is greater as relationships move further away from those which are readily recognizable as constituting family relationships". Therefore, given that family relationships are generally assumed as being part of the cisheteronormative nuclear family context, families that do not conform to this ideal may experience an increased need to negotiate family display. Whether or not non-normative families who display themselves in a way that is in accordance with hegemonic family norms (so as to navigate the social environment) actually 'do' family display has been called into question. Would such instances be best considered examples of 'successful display', or something else altogether (Zadeh, under review)?

Within the present study, this question is relevant to participants' use of pragmatic strategies (such as not correcting wrong assumptions) and pioneering strategies (such as attempting to change spaces or asserting identity within spaces). A distinction may be made between these strategies, in that the former involves displaying '*the* (cisheteronormative) family' and the latter involves displaying '*my* family'.[103] While displaying *the* family may have minimised experiences of discrimination, this was also found to be erasing and frustrating. Displaying *my* family was altogether more risky, in that participants aimed to ensure they were perceived in a way that felt authentic, but this was found to be isolating and tiring, and risked rejection. This distinction, as it relates to the experiences of TNB parents in particular, is an important extension to

[102] Finch (2007) notes that whilst there are similarities between the concepts of performance and display, Goffman's (1959) notion of performance is limited due to its conceptualisation of a strict actor/audience divide, whereas display theory suggests that individuals are often concurrently displaying family to others, understanding the displays of others and imagining how others may be viewing them as a family. Additionally, Goffman's notion of performance only includes face-to-face interaction, whereas family display also refers to other practices, such as the prominent display of family photos.

[103] It should be noted that nuclear families may also rely on displaying *the* family if, for instance, they emphasise the ways in which their family conforms to the ideal of a 'happy family' (Ahmed, 2008).

conceptions of family display and existing research on family that has used Goffman's dramaturgical perspective, and highlights the potential gains of using these theories in concert with one another. Future research could aim to understand more about the strategies of pragmatism and pioneering as instances of family-level performances, so as to further understand the nuances in processes of family display.

Normative negotiations

Another way in which parents negotiated understandings of the family was through negotiations with what is perceived as normal. Previous research on TNB parents has suggested that parenthood is a "normalising social location" (Haines et al., 2014, p. 239), and some participants expressed that being perceived as 'normal' was problematic. Several of the participants in this study recognised the privileges of being perceptibly 'normal' while also reflecting that this involved being accepted within a normative – and exclusionary – framework that they fundamentally disagreed with. Relatedly, a number of participants noted the benefits of 'escaping' what is perceived as normal (when 'normal' involves adhering to damaging and restrictive norms of gender and sexuality). Such findings can be considered in light of previous research with individuals living outside of conventional families (Hellesund et al., 2019), where the themes of 'ordinariness denied' and 'ordinariness escaped' were noted.

These findings can also be considered using Pfeffer's (2012) framework of normative resistance/inventive pragmatism. Specifically, Pfeffer's (2012) research with cis women with trans male partners found that participants rejected parenthood, due to its normative associations. However, the findings of this study somewhat complicate Pfeffer's (2012) distinction insofar as, being highly motivated to become parents, participants employed strategies to *negotiate* normativities (whether pragmatic or pioneering), rather than to resist normativities. Another way in which the findings of this study diverge from Pfeffer's (2012) framework is in her notion of *inventive* pragmatism, which does not adequately describe the ways in which pragmatic strategies were thought of as forced and/or necessary by participants. Such findings demonstrate that TNB parents may be in a unique situation of engaging extensively with normative systems in the process of becoming/being a parent, while remaining mindful of the importance of factors such as their children's welfare when making strategy decisions.

Under the umbrella

As discussed above, findings demonstrate that individuals with different gender identities (often thought of as part of the TNB umbrella) can have rather different experiences. The non-binary participants in this study in particular spoke about feeling erased, in that their identities (both as a non-binary person and a non-binary parent) lacked social recognition. Such findings

echo previous research, which has found that non-binary individuals express difficulties with navigating gendered parental names (i.e. mum and dad) (Fischer, 2020), and extends it, by demonstrating that non-binary parents may use different strategies to binary-trans parents when navigating the social environment. For instance, strategies of non-disclosure may not work in the same way for non-binary parents if they are perceived as 'other' in interaction as a result of, for example, their use of non-gendered pronouns (Darwin, 2017; Sumerau et al., 2020). Therefore, non-binary parents can be seen to be in a unique position of navigating a parenting world that is not only highly gendered, but also fails to acknowledge their very existence.

With regards to pregnancy specifically, differences were also identified between the experiences of non-binary and trans male parents. Non-binary parents faced challenges in navigating pregnancy as a non-binary person, for which they described there being no cultural script. Moreover, considering the fact that the 'pregnant man' has been sensationalised within the media (Pearce & White, 2019; Toze, 2018), it is perhaps unsurprising that the trans male participant in this study seemed to experience difficulties in integrating pregnancy into a male identity. Once having become a parent, the findings indicate that excessive praise for mundane parenting tasks may be experienced by trans male parents, something which has also been found in the experiences of cis male primary caregivers (Catherine Jones, 2019).

The findings also add to our understanding of the experiences of trans women. The trans women interviewed within this study all became parents due to having a pregnant partner/co-parent and reported feelings of exclusion, echoing previous research on the experiences of lesbian, bisexual and queer women who are non-birth parents (Abelsohn et al., 2013). In the present study, this exclusion was related to assumptions that non-birth parents would be men. Trans women spoke about negotiating their identity as parents in the face of numerous barriers, including a lack of parental leave and infant-feeding provision. Considering that trans women who become parents after identifying as such have been understudied, the findings of this study are particularly important.

Previous studies have tended to focus either on trans parents as a homogenous group (e.g. Haines et al., 2014) or on trans men or trans women (e.g. Charter et al., 2018; Simpson, 2018). This study's broad inclusion criteria allowed for an in-depth understanding of the way in which gender identity may be linked to different experiences. Previous research has suggested that trans women who are parents experience higher levels of discrimination than do their trans male counterparts (Hines, 2006a; S. E. James et al., 2016). This study's findings suggest that this discrimination is *qualitatively* different rather than of different amounts, an observation that speaks to the way in which parenting spaces are governed by assumptions about masculinity

and femininity. In particular, the findings highlight that trans women may not be granted 'access' to motherhood (or parenthood), whereas trans men may experience difficulties with aligning an involved parent identity with a male identity, given norms around cisgender womanhood and primary caregiving. Non-binary parents have previously been ignored within research (see Fischer, 2020 for an exception) and the current study's findings of feelings of erasure suggest that studying their experiences is important.

Alone at the intersection

The findings suggest that participants felt that they were 'alone at the intersection', in that LGBTQ+ spaces were not parent-friendly, and parenting spaces were not LGBTQ+ friendly. The theme of isolation has been previously identified in research on trans pregnancy (Charter et al., 2018; Hoffkling et al., 2017; Light et al., 2014); this study extends these findings to other routes to parenthood, and also beyond the transition to parenthood. Considering that some of the parenting spaces aimed at supporting parents, such as mother and baby groups, explicitly included those identifying as mothers and implicitly excluded all TNB parents by associating motherhood with pregnancy, this is unsurprising.[104] The findings of this study also suggest that TNB parents of adoptive children may feel particularly 'alone at the intersection'. Indeed, both adoptive parents who took part in this study reported feeling extremely vulnerable, due to adoption-specific processes, such as contested adoptions, and described experiencing both explicit and implicit transphobia and homophobia throughout their adoption journey. Crucially, those who had successfully adopted their child(ren) were found to depend on a key ally, demonstrating the importance of support in navigating uninclusive spaces. Given that TNB adoption has received little academic attention (C. Brown & Rogers, 2020), the findings of this study also suggest that further research on TNB adopters, as a group with unique needs and experiences, is clearly necessary.

Limitations and strengths

This study represents a unique contribution to the field of research on TNB parenting. However, it is not without its limitations, particularly relating to sampling and diversity. Firstly, although this study included parents with differing levels of engagement with LGBTQ+ communities, the majority of participants were recruited through LGBTQ+ spaces. It is possible that individuals engaged with such spaces are more involved in activism than are other TNB parents. Secondly, the majority of participants in this study were white. Research on TNB individuals has consistently struggled to obtain racially and ethnically diverse samples (Vincent, 2018). Given the findings of this study suggest that parents of different ethnicities may experience isolation

[104] Feelings of isolation have also been noted in the narratives of parents in other family types, such as cis male primary caregivers (Catherine Jones, 2019), suggesting that parenting spaces are not suitable for family diversity, more generally.

within the TNB community as well as isolation as a TNB parent, future research should explore this further. Some scholars have suggested that intersectional research that does not engage with racialisation is 'depoliticised intersectionality', and is limited in that it fails to attend to the interlocking systems of oppression that formed early intersectional analyses (Bilge, 2013). While this study aimed to engage with experiences of racialisation, it will be important for further research to explore the experiences of racially and ethnically diverse trans and/or non-binary parents.

Despite the limitations outlined above, the study has a number of strengths that make it an important contribution to the field. Firstly, the study's interactional and intersectional approach has allowed for an in-depth exploration of the everyday experiences of TNB parents in the UK, and how these relate to identity categories. The study's broad inclusion criteria and the examination of both priority and parenting categories facilitated an exploration of a number of factors that had until now not been researched in studies of TNB parent families, including the experiences of non-birth parents, parents in multi-parent families, and parents with disabilities. The use of these theoretical frameworks together has facilitated an understanding of how TNB parents may navigate interactions that deny the existence of their identity, and the empirical data examined within this study has enabled the extension of existing theoretical frameworks.

Implications for policy and practice: assuming gender and family diversity

The findings of this study have several practical implications. As in Study 1, these can be summed up as 'assuming gender diversity'. Given the findings of non-acceptance for families across various parenting spaces, it should also be added that spaces should be constructed in a way that assumes family diversity. Participants described the requirement to engage with unsupportive institutions on the journey to parenthood as one that took a particular emotional toll, given the discriminatory practices they encountered.[105] In fact, participants' experiences of explicit discrimination within fertility clinics and adoptive services (based on gender, sexuality, disabilities and number of parents) suggest that these institutions are acting unlawfully (Equality Act, 2010).

Within adoption, participants' experiences were characterised by pervasive and repeated discrimination, and it is therefore necessary that education about gender and family diversity within the social care system is made mandatory. It has been noted that the adoption system assessment process relies on "pervasive but narrow notions of what is acceptable in terms of family life" (Tasker & Bellamy, 2019, p. 15) and this is clearly evidenced in the findings of this study. Indeed, participants' feelings of vulnerability have been shown to extend far beyond the

[105] Ahmed (2016, p. 31) notes that survival becomes a "project when your existence is the object of a rebuttal".

initial adoption placement process, pointing to the importance of improving all aspects of the system. Improvements through education should be delivered via national social work training, and should not place a burden on individual social workers, as it has been previously noted that social workers must do independent research to accommodate TNB parents, for which they are often not given sufficient time (Hudson-Sharp, 2018).

Findings also suggest that a 'one size fits all' approach is not suitable for TNB parents navigating the adoption system. In particular, given that previous survey data found that LGBT+ adopters felt unable to disclose non-monogamous identities (New Family Social, 2020), it is important that family diversity (in all its forms) is not used as a reason to deny individuals the chance to become parents. It has been noted that, if the adoption system does not encourage parents to discuss the nuance and complexity of their family lives, the system will be slow to change (Tasker & Bellamy, 2019). Given the high level of interest in future adoption by TNB youth (Chen et al., 2018), and the increasing numbers of children in care (Department of Education, 2019), discriminating against TNB parents may not only be unlawful but is also a missed opportunity for both prospective adopters and adoptees. Given that some of the participants in this study were found to avoid adoption due to concerns about discrimination (see also Goldberg et al., 2020; Tasker & Gato, 2020), this seems especially poignant.

Within pregnancy spaces and IVF clinics, participants reported engaging with cisnormative institutions that conceptualised pregnancy as being associated with womanhood. Given that participants found detachment to be an effective strategy during pregnancy, it is important that fertility and pregnancy spaces use non-gendered language when speaking about anatomy. One notable piece of recent news that evidences the potential for change is a new initiative in Brighton that aims to be inclusive of TNB pregnancy (Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals NHS Trust, 2021). The initiative involves updated language (e.g. replacing 'mothers' with 'mothers and birthing parents') and the appointment of gender inclusion midwives, who are members of the TNB community and offer extra support to TNB pregnant people alongside their regular midwife appointments. This scheme therefore offers extensive support to TNB parents, and similar initiatives should be adopted across the country. Making gender-neutral language more commonplace within parenting spaces and in paperwork for birth parents would also arguably increase understanding of gender diversity amongst cis parents, something that ought to be reflected upon given the fact that cis parents were found to discriminate against parents in this study. The Brighton scheme has received significant backlash (Hunte, 2021), and it is therefore possible that such schemes may further polarise some parents. This should, of course, not be used as a reason not to proceed with changes. It is essential that the NHS and private

fertility clinics make spaces more inclusive, so that the burden on TNB parents to change the spaces themselves, as found in this study, is reduced.

Findings also point to the importance of improving parenting spaces for non-birth parents who are TNB. Participants in this study reported feelings of exclusion, and also reported being excluded from using necessary support mechanisms (such as extended parental leave). This suggests that the legal inflexibility about how TNB parents can identify (White, 2018) has consequences for parents in practice, and the findings thus suggest that allowing parents to choose how to identify on their children's birth certificates (as mother, father or parent) would have long-lasting and significant benefits. Moreover, increasing the number of possible parents on the birth certificate may also improve the experiences of multi-parent families, who currently lack legal (and social) recognition.

After the transition to parenthood, participants reported feelings of isolation, and it is therefore important that parenting spaces become more inclusive of both gender diversity and family diversity. For instance, parent and baby groups could be in accessible locations for parents with disabilities, provide adjustments and/or alternatives for those with autism, and not specify the gender of parents invited to the events. Importantly, by improving spaces that TNB parents enter with their children, this would have a positive impact on future TNB children and adolescents and children with TNB family members. Such change could also be bidirectional in effect: for instance, the educational implications outlined in Chapter 2 would not only improve the experiences of TNB children, but also the experiences of TNB parents and their children at school. Finally, the findings also suggest that exclusively queer parenting spaces would be beneficial for those parents who identified as part of the LGBTQ+ community, insofar as parents thought that LGBTQ+ spaces were often not parenting-friendly, and parenting spaces were often unsuitable for LGBTQ+ parents.

Given that 18- to 24-year-olds are more likely to identify as trans than older age groups (Flores, Herman, et al., 2016) and that rates of parenthood within LGBTQ groups are rising (Family Equality, 2019), it is possible to predict that numbers of TNB parents are increasing. However, if parenting spaces continue to rely on traditional understandings of what family is, the negative experiences of participants in this study will only be repeated in the future. It is therefore crucial that parenting spaces are improved. If the suggested changes were implemented now, future TNB parents would be able to make decisions around parenthood unconstrained by damaging normativities.

This study focussed on the experiences, strategies and identities of 13 trans and/or non-binary parents in the UK. It can be suggested that deciding to become a parent, in a society which

renders this position unimaginable, is in itself a pioneering act (Hoffkling et al., 2017).[106] Participants resisted the highly normative world of parenting, constructing counter-narratives to hegemonic norms and making strategic choices that allowed them to navigate parenting spaces. However, it is important to note that these choices were not always felt by participants to *be* choices, and cannot be seen as such. 'Choices' were often simply the only option, or involved choosing between multiple inappropriate options, thus pointing to the importance of improving parenting spaces for TNB parents, and diverse families more generally. Importantly, within safe spaces, such as at home, participants were able to make choices for parenting that encouraged acceptance, contrasting parents' own experiences within parenting spaces. This ultimately made navigating other spaces possible and worthwhile. As perhaps most aptly phrased by Max as part of their review of the themes of this study, "there is a silent testament here, I think, to our enormous capacity to love, and as love as a potential antidote to oppressive systems".

[106] This does not mean to suggest that trans reproduction in itself is 'exceptional', as this only serves to other TNB parents (Riggs et al., 2020). Rather, the act of becoming a parent in cisgenderist society can be seen as pioneering.

Chapter 4: General Discussion

Taken together, the two studies of this thesis make a unique contribution to scholarly understandings of the experiences and identities of gender-diverse adolescents (Study 1) and TNB parents (Study 2) in the UK. The thesis has explored the social experiences and identity processes of TNB individuals at two life stages at which gender may be particularly salient, given that each involves a time of identity change, specific interactions between individuals and institutions, and are each sites of contemporary social controversy. Given that the samples are similar in a number of ways (e.g. both focus on gender-diverse individuals in the UK) but differ in others (e.g. the age/life stage of participants, the inclusion of gender-questioning individuals), by reflecting on the findings in tandem it is possible to understand more about both the experiences of TNB individuals in general, and the unique experiences of adolescents and parents specifically. The findings from both studies demonstrate that TNB individuals experience extensive discrimination at both structural and interpersonal levels, but they use creative and diverse strategies to navigate and change the social environment. The following chapter will now explore the commonalities and differences between the findings of the two studies, specifically in relation to the studies' methodologies, empirical findings and theoretical contributions.

Methodologies

Whilst Study 1 and Study 2 focussed on different stages of the life course, they answered similar research questions using similar methodologies, and can thus be triangulated. Method triangulation involves the use of multiple data collection methods to study the same topic (Carter et al., 2014), and therefore Study 1 and Study 2 can be triangulated to understand more about the experiences that may be common to all gender-diverse individuals, and the experiences that may also be specific to adolescents and parents. Study 1 used a survey to explore the school experiences and identity processes of 74 gender-diverse adolescents, whereas Study 2 focussed on semi-structured interview data on the social experiences of 13 TNB parents. Qualitative research involves making decisions about breadth and depth (Malterud et al., 2016), and given that some participants in Study 1 gave short answers to the survey's open-ended questions, a large sample was decided upon. In contrast, Study 2 focussed on a much smaller sample of 13 participants, and in-depth interviews were conducted. This allowed for an analysis of the way in which individual participants' unique identities impacted and structured their experiences.

The sample size within Study 1 allowed for a qualitative comparative approach to be taken (see p. 55), meaning that differences in the experiences of binary-trans, non-binary and gender-questioning individuals could be explored. Although Study 2 did not take an explicitly

comparative approach, similar findings were echoed in this study – for instance, trans women, trans men and non-binary parents were each found to have unique experiences. Additionally, although Study 2 did not allow for a systematic comparison, participants were asked to comment on the findings in the process of communicative validation (see pp. 126-127). Similar to triangulation, communicative validation represents another way to add confidence to a study's findings (Hastings, 2012).

Both studies together demonstrate that there seem to be unique experiences for individuals with different gender identities under the TNB umbrella, and future research could therefore benefit from exploring this further. The studies' findings suggest that there is an increasing understanding that binary-trans individuals' identities are 'real', but the same cannot be said of fluid and non-binary identities. In other words, transnormativity may have replaced cisnormativity in certain social spaces. Such findings should be considered in light of current UK legislation; as outlined in Chapter 1, there is no explicit mention of non-binary identities within UK law or policy, and to obtain a GRC, an individual must state that they intend to live in that gender until death (Stonewall, 2020).

Both studies had a number of limitations; as discussed in Chapter 2 (see p. 92), the main limitation of Study 1 was its focus on one dimension of identity (gender) rather than taking into account other aspects of identity. An intersectional approach (as in Study 2) would be beneficial to study the experiences of gender-diverse adolescents going forward (e.g. Frost et al., 2019). Within Study 2, one key limitation was that the sample was majority white, allowing for limited analysis which focussed on experiences of racialisation. Therefore, future research could benefit from taking an intersectional approach, with an ethnically and racially diverse sample.

Empirical findings

Given that the studies' methodological approaches differed in a number of ways, the findings from each study can also be compared, in order to establish the similarities and differences (Hastings, 2012). Study 1 and Study 2 both found that normativities in the environment (manifested as structural and interpersonal stigma) negatively impacted upon the lives of TNB individuals in a multitude of ways. The studies also demonstrate that TNB individuals use diverse and creative strategies to navigate oppressive environments, and in using these diverse strategies, are able to resist normativities. Historically, such resistance has been pathologised by psychological research, which has succeeded in reinforcing normative understandings of gender (Fine, 2018; Rosales & Langhout, 2020). This thesis has instead aimed to *name* normativities, and thus explore their role in everyday interaction: it is deliberately set apart from this historical trajectory (Hammack, 2018). The studies' similarities and differences will now be explored, focusing in particular on normativities, stigma and resistance.

Normativities and stigma

At the start of the thesis, the current UK climate, and its key underlying normativities of cisheteronormativity and transnormativity, were discussed. The experiences of participants in both studies would suggest that these normativities structure the experiences of gender-diverse individuals at individual, interactional and institutional levels. Within both Study 1 and Study 2, participants described the ways in which their identities had been denied and erased both by others in interaction, and at an institutional level. Within Study 1, this was described in the process of identity threat, and by the specific themes of 'categories and constraints' and 'social feedback'. Within Study 2, this was described in the theme of 'highly normative world'. The studies' findings thus add to our understanding of the way in which normativities are enacted, and they suggest that it is important to study the impact of both interpersonal and structural stigma on TNB individuals. For instance, gender-diverse adolescents' experiences of institutional erasure at school can be compared to TNB parents' experiences of institutional erasure within pregnancy spaces. Additionally, participants' experiences of interpersonal stigma, (both actual and imagined) led to high levels of stress around disclosure, evidenced within both studies.[107]

Although discrimination and stigma were pertinent in similar ways to adolescents and parents, one key difference is the autonomy that participants were able to exercise. Firstly, adolescents attended school – a situation over which they had little choice. Parents were generally found to be more able to move freely between different spaces, although this was not always the case – some spaces that parents entered were mandatory or hard to avoid (including pregnancy/adoption spaces, fertility clinics and schools). However, all parents were able to construct their own spaces free from discrimination at home, and this points to the unique difficulties faced by gender-diverse adolescents who lack parental support, and who thus lack a safe 'back stage' (Goffman, 1959).

Participants' experiences of stigma should be placed within their sociolegal context. For instance, participants within both studies often reported being erased by institutional policies. The findings of Study 1 identified a lack of cohesive policies supporting gender diversity at school, suggesting that the current lack of legal support for gender-diverse children and adolescents is particularly impactful. The findings of Study 2 highlighted the, often negative, experiences of parents in pregnancy spaces, suggesting that the legal ruling that a person who gives birth is a mother, no matter their gender identity, is particularly harmful. Moreover, the legal limitation that only two parents be listed on a child's birth certificate was found to be

[107] This is consistent with a minority stress approach, which theorises the link between distal stressors (including discrimination and prejudice events) and internal, proximal stressors (including expectations of rejection, concealment and internalised stigma).

particularly challenging for those in multi-parent families. It has been noted that legal reform often precedes cultural reform (Burns, 2018), and it is clear that both legal and cultural reform have a long way to go be inclusive and support the many different gender identities that clearly exist.

Individual vs institution: Friction and resistance

Participants in both Study 1 and Study 2 reported having to engage with institutions that denied their very existence, and it is clear that receiving consistent negative appraisals was detrimental to them overall. However, such experiences of oppression also offered a site of resistance, an opportunity to "chip away…at the categories of sex and gender, for instance, that have chipped away at us" (Ahmed, 2016, p. 22). In particular, the participants in this research often described experiences of 'friction' against institutions that did not see their identities as valid, which was experienced as eroding the self at the same time as it was conceptualised as eroding institutions: participants' strategies of resistance *changed* these institutional spaces. For the gender-diverse adolescents in Study 1, findings captured by the theme of 'proactive protection' highlighted the activism and education undertaken by adolescents to improve the school environment for themselves and others. In Study 2, findings around the theme 'pioneering parent' captured the way in which parents not only altered uninclusive environments, but also chose to construct their own.

Alongside these explicit forms of resistance, the findings of these studies also showcase the smaller acts of resistance to cisgenderism undertaken by those who are TNB (including, for example, by correcting assumptions, asserting their identities, and also simply by being their authentic selves in environments that discourage this). The findings overall would therefore suggest that resistance among TNB populations is *nuanced*. It is not simply "conflict, open hostility, antagonism" (Haslam & Reicher, 2012, p. 157), as popularised social psychological accounts would suggest (Rosales & Langhout, 2020).[108] Indeed, resistance can take many forms, including resistance at an individual or covert level (Vollhardt et al., 2020). The participants in this research clearly engaged in resistance at multiple levels and in multiple ways, and consistently balanced such efforts with the need to live their lives (through, for example, negotiating disclosure of their identity and protecting themselves – and in the case of parents, their children – from discrimination). This is evidenced in the process of identity work in Study 1 and the themes of 'pioneering parent' and 'pragmatic parent' in Study 2. These acts of resistance should be explicitly named as such. Living life with a non-cis identity, in a world that assumes that all are identities are cis, is a courageous form of resistance to normativities.

[108] For instance, Haslam and Reicher (2012, p. 155) define resistance as "the process and act of challenging one's subordinated position in a given social system", and refer to examples such as prison riots.

One aspect that is evident in both studies is that resistance was often made easier by the existence and presence of other TNB individuals who were similarly resistant to normativities. For instance, participants in both studies described feeling motivated by other TNB individuals to improve uninclusive spaces. Participants within both studies spoke about the importance of support within the LGBTQ+ community, however participants' experiences of community somewhat differed between the two studies. In Study 1, those who wished to engage with community at school felt able to do so, but in Study 2, some parents found that there was little space within the TNB/LGBTQ+ community for parents, and within the parenting community for TNB parents. This potentially reflects key differences between the two life stages under study: while adolescence is generally thought of as obligatory, parenthood is a life event that has typically been less common within queer and trans communities – although rates of LGBTQ parenthood are increasing. This points to the particular importance of constructing spaces in which TNB parents may be able to feel supported and access community.

Theoretical contributions

Beyond the empirical contributions of this thesis, this work makes a number of theoretical contributions, most specifically in relation to SSI. The thesis used SSI to understand participants' experiences of identity, and how these related to experiences within the environment. SSI's conceptualisation of society as patterned interactions, resistant to change, was shown to be particularly useful in exploring the stability of normativities and the multitude of ways in which they are reproduced in the environment in the context of TNB experiences.

SSI has been summarised in the phrase "society shapes self, shapes social interaction" (Sheldon Stryker, 2008, p. 19). Indeed, the findings from this thesis clearly demonstrate that normativities and structural stigma impact the way in which individuals conceptualise their identities, and the ways in which they navigate social interactions as a result. However, the thesis' findings also make clear that social interactions shape the self. Greater theoretical expansion may be necessary to explain the precise mechanisms by which individuals' experiences within social interactions impacted their own understanding of themselves, particularly for those whose identities were denied or erased within interaction. Relatedly, the findings from this thesis suggest that SSI is perhaps insufficient as an analytical framework to take into account experiences of identity at an individual or intrapersonal level – as found in Study 1, participants who were not able to do *their* gender within interaction, due to societal norms and/or negative social feedback, still experienced their gender as subjectively authentic (see pp. 89-90). It is therefore important that the identity processes of individuals whose identities are erased and denied in interaction are further explored, and that SSI is expanded to

more comprehensively take into account the complexities of the relationship between the self and social interaction.

Relatedly, Study 2 also focussed on display and performativity at a family level, and another important theoretical contribution of this thesis lies is its contribution to theories in the sociology of the family (see pp. 153-154). The findings of Study 2 suggest that TNB parents not only display their own family, but also display *the* family, as a way of managing stigma. Exploring this distinction further would be fruitful in elucidating the mechanisms by which families who do not conform to societal expectations of family navigate the social environment.

The thesis' findings also make clear the importance of taking a multi-level approach to understanding stigma. Within Study 1, interpersonal stigma was described in the theme of 'social feedback' and structural stigma within the theme of 'categories and constraints'. Within Study 2, the theme of 'highly normative world' included experiences of both interpersonal and structural stigma, and both studies corroborate existing scholarly understandings that the different levels of stigma are highly interconnected. This thesis has used a number of theoretical frameworks to conceptualise participants' experiences of stigma,[109] and using such theories in combination has been shown to be effective approach for highlighting the existence of stigma at multiple levels (see e.g. Frost, 2020). The studies' findings suggest that a single, multi-level approach could be useful for more fully explicating how different types of stigma are collectively enacted and experienced, and this could be explored in future research.

Future research directions

Theoretically, the two studies presented in this thesis make a number of important contributions. However, it is clear that further research is necessary, particularly in order to understand more about the identity processes and experiences of individuals and/or families whose existence is denied and erased both interpersonally and structurally. Future research could also aim to integrate the investigation of interpersonal and structural stigma, and, specifically, the way in which these factors impact the lives of TNB individuals during the two transitions in the life course that have been the focus of this work. The findings of the two studies of this thesis also highlight the need for research to engage further with the experiences of gender-diverse adolescents and parents specifically. The approaches used within this thesis represent but one possible way in which to study these groups; future research therefore could (and should) use different categories to explore the experiences and identities of gender-diverse individuals. Depending on the research questions, participants could be categorised in other ways, such as by contrasting the school experiences of trans boys/trans-masculine individuals

[109] The theories used within this thesis include structural stigma theory, minority stress theory, labelling theory, Goffman's stigma theory, intersectionality theory and theories of identity work.

and trans girls/trans-feminine individuals. As suggested on p. 162, an intersectional approach (as in Study 2) would be beneficial to study the experiences of gender-diverse adolescents. Additionally, an approach of analysing different gender identities separately (as in Study 1) could elucidate the unique situations of parents with different gender identities.

The findings also point to the importance of studying other aspects of TNB lives that may involve particularly close engagement with unsupportive institutions. Aspects that have already been explored include healthcare (e.g. Pearce, 2018), the workplace (e.g. Connell, 2010) and prison (e.g. Nulty et al., 2019). However, the findings overall point to a need for an urgent investigation into the experiences of TNB individuals within 'total institutions' (Goffman, 1962).[110] A number of organisations, such as in Family Equality's 'Every Child Deserves a Family' campaign, aim to promote the best interests of LGBTQ+ children within the foster care and adoption system, and empirical research on the experiences of gender-diverse youth within this system is clearly necessary. Additionally, whilst some preliminary research has been conducted on the experiences of trans and gender non-conforming older adults' experiences of stigma (Fabbre & Gaveras, 2020), it is necessary for research to explore the experiences of TNB adults within the care system specifically.

Final reflections

One key aim of sociological social psychology is to explore the way in which normative systems and institutions impact the everyday lives of individuals. The two studies of this thesis offer a unique exploration into the experiences and identities of UK gender-diverse individuals, and they demonstrate the impact of normative institutions on these experiences. The way in which gender diversity is regarded within the public sphere seems to be going simultaneously forwards and backwards. For instance, government policies that mandate inclusion of LGBTQ+ issues in the school curriculum (Department for Education, 2019) can be contrasted with the lack of adequate policy supporting gender-diverse youth specifically (Long & Loft, 2020), and the recent decision to restrict access to puberty blockers amongst children and adolescents (Bowcott, 2020). In relation to each of the life stages with which this thesis has been concerned, the Equality Act's statement that no one should be discriminated against due to their gender identity is clearly not being upheld in public spaces, from schools to pregnancy and adoptive services. The findings of the studies in this thesis demonstrate that TNB individuals themselves are navigating and resisting the normative environment within the UK, but the UK Government's refusal to listen to what is needed (e.g. Truss, 2020) is evidently prohibiting progress. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, these studies point to the urgent need for legislative

[110] Goffman (1962, p. 313) notes that whilst all institutions have "encompassing tendencies", total institutions are those in which individuals conduct most aspects of their lives, limiting social interaction with the outside.

reform insofar as existing policies partially support binary-trans individuals; do not support non-binary individuals; and do not support adolescents. In accordance with the social justice aims of this thesis, the findings will be distributed in a number of ways (to both academic and non-academic audiences), in order to try and contribute to improving the social environment for TNB individuals. In conclusion, this thesis should be read as a call for significant social change to policy and practice, so as to reduce the burden on TNB adolescents and parents as they navigate this normative world.

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Appendices

Appendix I – Open ended questions asked of gender-diverse adolescents

1. Is there anything else, positive or negative, you'd like to tell us about your experience of talking to your school about being trans?
2. Lots of things in schools are often separated by gender, including toilets, changing rooms and uniforms. There are also different things schools can do to support trans pupils. Do you have any comments?
3. Is there anything you would like to say about the use of homophobic, biphobic or transphobic language, what happens when students or staff hear it and how you would like the school to respond?
4. Please tell us more about what happened when you were bullied - what happened, how long it went on for, if anyone tried to help, how you felt – anything that helps to understand what it is was like for you.
5. Is there anything you'd like to say about the impact that homophobic, biphobic or transphobic bullying has had on your school work and plans for future education?
6. Is there anything you want to say about self-harm and suicide and whether you have been given any help?
7. We are also interested to know about any support you have received from health services, for example from your GP, a counsellor or therapist, from a gender identity clinic etc. Please tell us who you've contacted and anything else you'd like to share, positive or negative, about your experience.
8. Is there anything you would like to say about coming out (to others or to yourself) e.g. whether or not you have come out to others, if so, how easy or difficult it was, who you told when, how different people reacted etc?
9. Are there any particular things that have been done in your school or any of the schools you've been in that have made a positive difference to you and other LGBT students?
10. Can you tell us of any role models you have who help or support you as a lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans young person – this can include people among your friends and family, or people who are famous or in the mediaDo you have any particular hopes or aspirations for the future?
11. What do you think are your best characteristics, the things that will help you be happy or successful in life?

Appendix 2 - List of codes identified within the binary-trans dataset

able to change name at school	out about sexuality not gender identity
acceptance of being trans	parent doesn't want to hear about sexuality
affected by transphobic jokes	parent understood due to trans family member
afraid to speak to counsellor	parent worried about influence of other trans people
assemblies on LGBT issues	parental support
attended trans support group	parents allowing transition
avoids pastoral team	parents got used to identity
barriers to coming out	partner as role model
better experience in new school	partner as support
bullied at home	pastoral team not helpful
bullying about gender before coming out	people don't understand trans
came out as gay first	people scared to challenge anti-LGBT language
came out as gay online	popular to use anti-LGBT language
came out online	positive characteristics
came out to everyone as trans	positive result of coming out
came out to parents	posters help with LGBT people
came out via letter	preferred name as nickname in NHS
can use alternative toilet	read as cis LGBT
can't use toilet which matches gender	recommendation for gender neutral language
celebrity as role model	received questions about identity
changes official gender markers at school	received referral to GIC
coming out as continual process	refusal to use preferred name
concept of "proper" trans	role model at school
confidentiality	rumours strengthened friendship
cultural reason anti-LGBT	safety
deadnaming	scared to come out
didn't want to draw attention to transness	school did not make gender neutral toilets
difficulties with coming out	school ignores bullying
difficulty with bi and trans identity	sees self as better than bullies
doesn't accept own identity	sexist comments
doesn't like using disabled toilet	sibling as role model
doesn't want to be othered	simplistic teaching of LGBT issues
doesn't want to get changed with others	social life gets better
easier to deal with misgendering than pastoral team at school	some support, not total acceptance
educating others	sport accommodated to gender
education to reduce LGBT bullying	staff combat anti-LGBT language
family aspiration	staff combat homophobia, not transphobia
family member as role model	staff ignore anti-LGBT language
friends as role model	staff lack knowledge about LGBT issues
gay role models in media	staff offered to use gender neutral language
gender identity seen as part of mental illness	staff transphobic
gender neutral toilets important	STEM aspiration
gendered assumptions	struggling

gendered stereotypes	students police anti-LGBT language
happiness aspiration	subject of gossip
hard to keep going	suicidal thoughts due to dysphoria
helps other LGBT students	support from friends
higher standard of gender for trans people	support from school
home life difficult	supported by GP
identity misunderstood by parents	taught about some LGB issues
improvement aspiration	teacher as role model
insulted behind back	took friends a while to get used to identity
job aspiration	transphobia seen as valid opinion
lack of discussion of LGBT issues	trans family member helpful
lack of support at school	trans people in media as role model
lack of support from parents	trans seen as a choice
lack of understanding LGBT	trans youtuber as role model
legal reasoning used by school	transition related aspiration
lesson on LGBT issues focussed on homophobia	transphobic bullying
LGBT community at school	tried to combat transphobic comments
LGBT youtubers as role model	tries to ignore bullying
long term bullying	unacceptance of identity
minimal support from staff	unaffected by being trans
misgendering	use of gendered language
mixed staff response to anti-LGBT language	uses alternative changing room
name changed at school	wants hormones
negative effects of bullying	wants more gender-neutral bathrooms
nervous to use gendered toilets	wants more understanding from parents
new school better than old school	wants staff to act on anti-LGBT language
no hope for future	wants staff to understand more about anti-LGBT language
no trans support groups in area	wants to be taught about LGBT issues
non-binary celebrity role model	wants to come out to parents
normality aspiration	wants to do sport with other boys
not allowed to use preferred toilets	wants to pass as cis
not out at school	was able to avoid doing sports
not out to parents	was allowed to use appropriate toilets
nothing positive done at school	worried about people's future reactions
online support	worried about reaction to changed name
only allowed to use preferred bathroom if come out	worried staff will teach LGBT wrong
othered for using alternative changing room	youth worker as LGBT role model

Appendix 3 - List of codes identified within the non-binary dataset

acceptance aspiration	name changed at school
acceptance of identity	name/pronoun change aspiration
afraid of bullying	negative effects of bullying
afraid of outing self	no hope for future
age barrier to acceptance	non-binary identity, doesn't mind either toilet
attends group for young LGBT people	non-binary insult
authenticity elsewhere	non-binary invisible
barriers to coming out	non-binary not understood
binary system at school	not allowed to change gender on register
binary uniform distressing	not allowed to change name on register
bullied about gender although not out	not allowed to choose toilet
bullied by peers	not allowed to present as non-binary
bullied for sexuality	not out to others
bullied for using preferred name	not out to parents
bullying keeps coming back	nothing positive done at school
came out	no-uniform is better
came out at school	online bullying
came out to friend(s)	online role model
came out to parents	online support
can talk about LGBT issues at school	only out to close friends
career aspiration	open with parent about LGBT issues
celebrities as role models	openness aspiration
challenges anti-LGBT language	other people heard of terminology
challenges to anti-LGBT language are ineffective	out to one parent not the other
cisnormative sex ed	outed to parents by school
comfortableness aspiration	parent as role model
coming out difficult	parent homophobia
coming out easier than expected	parents did not react well to sibling
coming out helped others	parents not informed
comments about identity	people disagree with LGBT
concept of "real" world	people don’t understand trans
counsellor homophobic	people see gender neutral toilet as joke
counsellor lacked knowledge of trans issues	policed on bathroom choice
created LGBT group	policy changed to gender neutral clothing
difference between parents and friends	popular to use anti-LGBT language
difference between school policy and reality	preferred name more comfortable
doesn't fit in the binary	preferred name/pronouns important
doing something positive in school	pretending to have not come out
don’t teach about LGBT issues	protective of LGBT friends
easier to come out about sexuality than gender identity	reacted to bullying
educating others	received questions
expected positive reaction to coming out	regrets coming out
family as role models	religious objection to identity
family aspiration	scared about using gender-neutral toilet
family members make offensive comments	scared to report bullying
feels uncomfortable with birth name	school doesn't allow anti-LGBT language
felt forced to come out	school ignored gender identity

forced to come out due to rumours	school ignores LGBT
friends as role models	school not allowing non-binary person to change in gendered space
friends struggle with pronouns	school not experienced with trans
future plans affected by non-binary identity	school used bullying as excuse for lack of support
gender enforced by school	sibling who is trans
gender ignored by others	small town
gendered clothing	some staff good with LGBT community
gone back into closet	sports reinforces dysphoria
happiness aspiration	staff as role model
happy when friends came out	staff help with bullying
hard to accept own identity	staff homophobic
hard to come out	staff ignore anti-LGBT language
hasn't come out to family	staff ignore bullying
hates school due to lack of attention to language	staff not willing to learn about homophobia
helping aspiration	staff transphobic
heteronormative	straight privilege and heteronormativity
home life difficult	subject of gossip
homophobia	thinks family will be accepting
hopes for more acceptance in future	trans support group
ignores gender stereotypes	trans/non-binary youtubers as role model
ignores offensive comments	transition related aspiration
ignoring bullying	transphobic bullying
information spread	trapped
internet as safe space	tried to ignore bad social/home life
lack of authenticity	tries to make a positive difference
lack of education about LGBT	unacceptance of identity
lacks confidence	use of social media account
laughed at for identity by GP	want staff to act on anti-LGBT language
LGBT community at school	wants gender neutral toilet
LGBT issues not taken seriously	wants more understanding from parent
LGBT related aspiration	wants school to teach about effects of language
LGBT role models in media	wants to come out
LGBT staff at school	wants to move school due to bullying
LGBT youtubers as role model	won't access support because worried about parents finding out
long term bullying	won’t come out to parents
media miseducates people	won't come out to staff due to parents finding out
media pressure for young people	worried about confidentiality
misgendering	worried about discrimination in the future
mixed narrative around bullying	worried about outing self
mixed staff response to anti-LGBT language	worried about safety
most staff don’t use preferred name	worried parents will out them

Appendix 4 - List of codes identified within the gender-questioning dataset

acceptance aspiration	no role models
acceptance for others	non-binary
activism not accepted	no-one out at school
afraid of being outed	not come out to counsellor
afraid to come out about gender	not come out to many people
anti-LGBT climate	not out as questioning
anti-LGBT comments	not out to family
anti-LGBT language used	not out to parents
appearance aspiration	nothing positive done in school
authenticity	online bullying
authenticity aspiration	online bullying hard to limit
being outed easier than coming out	online LGBT role models
biphobia	only comes out to certain people
bullied due to experimentation	openness aspiration
bulling from closeted LGBT	other language taken more seriously than LGBT
bullying before coming out	others assume medical transition
came out about sexuality before gender	others don't know how to react to coming out
came out as trans	others don't use preferred name
came out to friends	others supportive of identity
can't experiment with gender identity	others think it is a phase
career aspiration	others tried to help bullying
close friends supportive	out about sexuality, not gender identity
coming out difficult	out to one parent, not the other
coming out easier than expected	outed by peer
comments after coming out	parent restricting support
concealing identity	parent support
confident despite bullying	parent worried about trans
confidentiality	parents as role model
created LGBT support group	parents mean well
difference between school and home	parents not informed
different identity in different places	parents not supportive
distressing to be with wrong gender at school	parents partly supportive
doesn't feel comfortable reporting bullying to staff	parents suspect
doesn’t feel safe seeking support	parents want strict categories
doesn't fit into categories	partner supportive
experimentation would mean coming out	partner uncomfortable with pronouns
family aspiration	physical retaliation to bullying
family don't understand	policy for offensive language
fear of being judged	positive characteristics
feelings of isolation	positive things at school
feels comfortable with LGBT friends	pressure on gendered behaviour
feels safe with LGBT staff member	pupils homophobic
feels uncomfortable at home	questioning at the moment

forced to come out to parent	questioning gender due to someone else's opinion
friends as role models	questioning means uncertainty
friends as second family	questioning people should be supported
friends fear other people's reactions	regrets coming out method
friends guessed about identity	rejection of labels
friends reacted well to coming out	religious objection
gendered comments	safety
gendered environments hard	scared to access help
gendered school environment	scared to come out
good reactions to coming out	scars outed self to parent
hard to keep identity to self	school attempts to help LGBT students unsuccessful
has not come out	severe long-term bullying
helps other LGBT students	siblings as role models
heteronormativity	some staff support community
homophobic family	staff as role model
homophobic/transphobic staff	staff challenge anti LGBT language
identity laughed at	staff helped end bullying
internet LGBT community as role models	staff ignore anti-LGBT language
lack of confidentiality	staff laugh at offensive comments
lack of education about LGBT	staff unhelpful about bullying
lack of education about offensive language	students bring up LGBT
lack of education makes it hard to be open	students give advice not staff
lack of recognition for fluidity	subject of gossip
leave home aspiration	talks to parents about LGBT
lessons about LGBT	tension between different spheres
LGBT aspiration	thinks parents will accept
LGBT bullying not as important as other types	told too young to label gender
LGBT celebrity as role model	trans students left school
LGBT community as role model	transition aspiration
LGBT community at school	transphobic students
LGBT initiatives not popular	tries to make a positive difference at school
LGBT issues not discussed	trying not to be trans
LGBT youtubers as role model	unaffected by questioning identity
love aspiration	unsure of gender
media anti LGBT	used to question gender
media influence people	using non-binary terms
minimal teaching of LGBT issues	wants LGBT issues to be discussed
mixed narrative	wants more LGBT awareness
mixed narrative around parents	wants non-binary facilities
mixed reactions from friends	wants staff to challenge anti-LGBT language
negative effects of bullying	wants to find out about self before coming out
nervous to challenge language	won't come out to family until left home
no hopes for future	worried about future
no positive characteristics	worried about objectification

Appendix 5 – Initial flyer posted in queer spaces

Participate in a groundbreaking study of families with trans parents!

Are you (or your partner(s)) a trans parent (including non-binary, gender-fluid, or gender non-conforming parents)?

Have you identified as trans since before your child's birth?

Do you have a child aged 0-10 years old?

If so, we would like to invite you to take part in our 21st Century Family Study. This study follows on from our previous exploratory study with trans parent families.

If you want to find out more about the study, please contact us at: 21centuryfam@cfr.cam.ac.uk.

We would like to thank Gendered Intelligence for their help with researcher training and recruitment.

Taking part in this study is entirely confidential and no identifying information will ever be published. This project has received ethical approval by the University of Cambridge Psychology Research Ethics Committee.

gi gendered intelligence

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Centre for Family Research

Appendix 6 – Longer flyer sent to interested parents

Participate in a groundbreaking study of families with trans parents

- **Are you (or your partner(s)) a trans parent (including non-binary, gender-fluid or gender non-conforming parents), and have you identified as trans since before your child's birth?**
- **Do you have a child aged 0-10 years old?**

If so, we would like to invite you to take part in our 21st Century Family Study! This study follows on from our previous exploratory study with trans parent families.

Why are we doing the study?

The 21st Century Family Study aims to explore family life, family relationships, and the wider social experiences of families in which there is at least one trans parent who has identified as trans since before having children. We hope to increase understanding of children's and parents' experiences both inside and outside their families, and to broaden public understanding of diversity in family life. We also hope that this study will inform legislators and policy makers around the world in relation to families with trans parents.

What does taking part involve?

We will arrange a convenient time and place to meet with you and your family for 2-3 hours. It involves:

- An interview and questionnaires for you (and if applicable, your partner(s))
- A play task with you and your child
- Activities and questions for your child if they are aged 4-10 and would like to take part.

We're happy to see you and your family members at different times if this is easier for you. As a token of our appreciation, your family will receive a gift voucher.

Will taking part be kept confidential?

Yes – taking part and anything you say during our meeting will be kept strictly confidential. The identity of your family will be known only to members of the research team. No information that would make you identifiable will ever be published. This project has been approved by the University of Cambridge Psychology Research Ethics Committee.

How do I find out more about the study?

Our project coordinators can provide you with more information about the study. You will be under no obligation to take part. Please email our researchers at 21centuryfam@cfr.cam.ac.uk. Thank you!

To arrange to take part in the study, or for more information, please contact us at: 21centuryfam@cfr.cam.ac.uk

You will be under no obligation to take part.

To learn more about the Centre for Family Research, please visit:

www.cfr.cam.ac.uk

We look forward to hearing from you!

gendered intelligence
increasing understandings of gender diversity

We would like to thank Gendered Intelligence for their help with researcher training and recruitment.

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Appendix 7 – Information sheet for TNB parent study

Director: Professor Susan Golombok

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

CENTRE FOR FAMILY RESEARCH

Free School Lane, Cambridge CB2 3RQ

Office: 01223 334510

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INFORMATION SHEET

Thank you for your interest in our study of parents and children in families with trans parent(s). We would like to tell you more about the study and what taking part involves.

Why are we doing the study?

This study is one of the first to look at children's and parents' experiences in families with trans or non-binary parent(s). We are asking parents who have identified as trans since before having children with a child aged 0-10 years to take part in this study in order to explore family life, family relationships and wider social experiences. We hope to increase understanding of children's and parents' experiences both inside and outside their families, and to broaden public understanding of diversity in family life. We also hope that this study will inform legislators and policy makers around the world in relation to families with trans parents.

What does taking part involve?

As part of the study you will be interviewed and asked to fill out questionnaires about your experiences of being a parent, your route to parenthood, your family life, and your child's development. The interview will be recorded and will last approximately 1-1.5 hours and the questionnaires will take about 15 minutes to complete.

If your child is aged 4-10 we would also like to do some activities with them, which should take approximately 30 minutes to complete. For children of all ages, we would also like to make a video recording of you and your child doing a task together for 10 minutes. We will make it clear to your child that they do not have to take part if they do not want to and may stop the interview at any time, without giving a reason. If you do not wish your child to participate in the study then you may take part without their involvement.

If you live with a partner we would also be interested in interviewing them. This could take place on the same day as your interview or on a separate visit. However, it is not necessary for your partner to be interviewed in order for you to take part in the study.

Finally we would like to ask your child's teacher to complete a questionnaire about your child's behaviour at school. This is not necessary in order for you or your child to take part in the study. We shall not contact your child's teacher unless you give the interviewer the teacher's contact details and permission to send the questionnaire. Teachers will be told that their pupil is participating in a study looking at family life and child development. No further details about the type of families being studied will be given.

The interview can be carried out at a time and place of your choice, and the whole visit will last approximately 2-3 hours. You are under no obligation to take part. If you wish to withdraw from the study, or if there are any questions that you do not wish to answer, you just need to let the interviewer know.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Anything that you or your child say during this research will be kept strictly confidential. This means that:

- Personal details of your family will only be known to the research team and the person who interviews you. Personal details, audio and video recordings will be stored in a locked file or a secure computer with access only by the immediate research team.
- Information entered onto the computer for data analysis will not include names/addresses or any other identifying information.
- Information you give us will be primarily used for statistical purposes, and the results will be reported in terms of cases and percentages. If any individual data are presented, the data will be totally anonymous, without any means of identifying the individuals involved.
- When the results of the study are published, you will not be identified as having taken part in the study. Neither will information which might make you identifiable be published.
- The interview recordings may be transcribed for data analysis and some of your responses may be reported in our publications. Your identity will not be disclosed.
- Confidentiality will be broken **only** in the rare circumstance that it was disclosed during the interview that your child was being harmed. In all other cases the privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of you and your family will remain intact.

What will happen to the findings of the research?

The findings will be written up for publication in academic journals and presented at academic conferences and to other specialist groups of professionals. To increase public awareness and understanding we intend to make the findings widely available through the media. We also hope to produce a variety of educational resources based on the findings for both professionals, such as teachers and social workers, and for school children, to encourage learning about one another's family lives. A report of the study's findings will also be available to the study participants.

Who is doing this research?

The study is headed by Professor Susan Golombok, Director of the Centre for Family Research at the University of Cambridge. Susan Golombok has thirty years' experience of researching parenting and family life in different types of families. The interviews will be carried out by Dr Sophie Zadeh and Dr Susan Imrie, Research Associates at the Centre for Family Research, and Susie Bower-Brown, a PhD student at the Centre for Family Research.

Who should I contact if I want further information?

If you have any questions about the study please contact either Susie Bower-Brown (email: sb2029@cam.ac.uk, phone: 01223 334518); Dr Susan Imrie (email: si275@cam.ac.uk, phone: 01223 768219) or Dr Sophie Zadeh (01223 331 967). If there is any aspect of the study that concerns you, you may speak to the University of Cambridge Ethics Committee (phone: 01223 766894).

Please keep this information sheet in case you want to contact us at a later time or if there is anything you want to check. *This project has been reviewed by the Psychology Research Ethics Committee of the University of Cambridge and has received ethical approval.*

Appendix 8 – Interview schedule

HOUSEHOLD STRUCTURE

I'd like to begin by getting a few details about your family and who lives here with you.

How would you describe your gender identity?

(And your partner's?)

What are your preferred pronouns? And [partner]'s? And [child]'s?

IF PARTNER(S):

How long have you and [partner] been together?

Are you and [partner] married/ do you have a civil partnership?

Were you a couple when [child] was born?

Does your partner have any children from a previous relationship who live elsewhere?

ALL:

Do you have any children who don't live with you?

IF NO PARTNER IN HOUSEHOLD:

Do you have partner(s) that doesn't live with you?

Have you ever been married or lived with someone?

OCCUPATION STATUS

Are you working now?

IF YES: Is that full-time or part-time?

What is your occupation?

IF NO: Have you worked in the past?

IF PARTNER(s) IN HOUSEHOLD:

And is [partner] working just now?

IF YES: Is that full-time or part-time?

IF NO: Have they worked in the past?

What is [partner]'s occupation?

Would you say you're experiencing any financial difficulties at the moment?

How did you hear about the study?

PARENT DEVELOPMENT INTERVIEW

I'd like to start by asking you some questions now about your relationship with (child).

A.

Before I start asking specific questions, could you briefly describe what (child) is like?

On an average day, what would you describe as his/her most favorite moments?

On an average day, what would you describe as his/her least favorite moments?

What do you like most about (child)?

What do you like least about (child)?

Do you notice any particular ways in which (child) seems to be similar to you?

Do you notice any particular ways in which (child) seems to be similar to (partner)?

Are there any particular ways in which (child) is different to you?

Are there any particular ways in which (child) is different to (partner)?

B.

I'd like you to choose 3 adjectives that you feel reflect the relationship between you and (child). *(pause while they list adjectives)*

Could you tell me why you chose those adjectives? *(Take adjectives one by one and ask for an illustration)*

Can you describe a time in the last week when you and (child) really 'clicked'?

(probe if necessary: Can you tell me more about the incident? How did you feel? How do you think (your child) felt?)

Can you describe a time in the last week when you and (child) really weren't 'clicking'?

(probe if necessary: Can you tell me more about the incident? How did you feel? How do you think (your child) felt?)

Are there any experiences in (child's) life that you feel were particularly difficult or challenging for them?

As (child)'s relationship with you develops, how do you think it is affecting his/her development or personality?

C.

Could you briefly describe yourself as a parent?

(If parent has other children, include view of self as parent of these children if parent volunteers this information, but ask for specific examples with target child in mind)

What gives you the most joy in being a parent?

What gives you the most pain or difficulty in being a parent?

When you worry about (child), what do you find yourself worrying about the most?

How has having (child) changed you?

Do you ever feel that you really need emotional support as a parent? What kinds of situations make you feel this way?

How do you handle your feelings of needing support? Is the support you get enough?

Do you ever feel really angry as a parent?

(Probe: What kinds of situations make you feel this way? How do you handle your angry feelings? How do you think these situations effect (child)?)

Do you ever feel really guilty as a parent?

(Probe: What kinds of situations make you feel this way? How do you handle these guilty feelings? What kind of effect do these feelings have on (child)?)

When (child) is upset, what do they do? How does that make you feel? What do you do?

How easy or difficult is it to predict what will upset (child)/put him/her in a bad mood?

What is it like for you when (child) refuses to do what you ask him/her to do, or deliberately provokes you?

Do you think (child) ever feels rejected by you?

How readily does (child) accept cuddles or physical affection from you?

How far does (child) try and control you and what you do? What does he/she do? Are they bossy/controlling/looking after/parenting/not over-controlling?

D.

Now I'd like to as you about times when you and (child) are separated from one another. By separated I mean when (child) is left with someone familiar for a usual amount of time.

What are routine separations like for (child) and for you?

What is hard for you about these separations? How do you handle those feelings?

What is easy for you about these separations?

What is the longest time you have been separate from (child)? How did you and (child) feel about this separation?

DEVELOPMENT & BEHAVIOUR

Now I have some questions about how [child] has been doing more generally…

Have you had any particular worries about (child's) behaviour or development?

Is there any problem over separating from you? Or is everything fine?
IF YES: How do you deal with this?
How are they when you first meet up again after being separated? What do they do?

Have there been any persistent difficulties like:
Difficulties with reading or writing?
Difficulties with learning things at school/nursery?

Or any particular problems with [child]'s behaviour:
Like being very defiant or disobedient to you?
Or showing a very bad temper or aggressive behaviour?

Or any problems like being very anxious or sad:
Like refusing to go to school?
Or being **very** scared of something?
Or being **very** restless and unable to settle to anything?
Or seeming very miserable or unhappy for long periods of time (days or weeks)?

PARENT A'S HEALTH

I would now like to ask you a few things about your health.

What has your own health been like recently? (i.e. in the last year)

Have you had to see your family doctor for worrying, depression, anxiety or any other psychological problems?

IF YES: Obtain details of nature, severity and duration of problem

Have you received a psychological diagnosis?

Have you had any kind of regular prescription for worrying, depression, anxiety or any other psychological problems?

BECOMING A PARENT

So now I'd like to ask you a few questions about your gender identity, your decision to become a parent, and your experiences of becoming a parent. The questions are designed for a broad group of people, so if there is a question that isn't relevant, let me know and we will move on.

When did you decide you wanted to become a parent?

And at what age did you first realise you were trans/non-binary?

PROBE: is gender identity now the same as when [child] was born?

Did your transition/gender identity affect your desire to have children in any way?

How important was becoming a parent in deciding how you wanted to transition/express your gender identity?

PROBE: Did it affect when or how you transitioned?

IF MEDICAL TRANSITION: Were you offered advice about fertility preservation? Was it helpful?

If yes, did you have your gametes frozen? Was this available on the NHS?

If no, would you have liked to have had more advice? Would you have liked to have your gametes frozen?

ALL: So can I just check, how did you conceive [child]?

Why did you choose this method?

PROBE: Was a genetic connection important to you or were there other factors?

IF PARTNER, was your partner involved in the reproduction process?

If involved, how did you and your partner decide on your method of conception?

PROBE: did you talk to friends and/or family? Did you get advice from resources?

How do you think your partner found the process of becoming a parent?

IF NO PARTNER/DIFF PARTNER, how did you make this decision?

PROBE: did you talk to friends and/or family? Did you get advice from resources?

IF GAMETE DONATION/SURROGACY

How did you find your donor/surrogate?

Was anything about the donor/surrogate particularly important to you?

Is the donor anonymous or identifiable or someone you know?

If known donor, does [child] have any contact with the donor?

How did you find your surrogate?

If met through agency/organisation: Did you meet your surrogate?

If known surrogate, does [child] have any contact with the surrogate?

Have you talked to your child about the way they were conceived?

If donor or surrogate, how do you think [child] feels about their donor/surrogate?

IF EXPERIENCED MALE/NON-BINARY PREGNANCY:

Could you describe your experience of pregnancy as a trans man/non-binary person (use gender identity as described by participant).

Can you tell me how you felt when you first found out you were pregnant?

How did you feel about the changes your body went through whilst pregnant?

PROBE: was it distressing? Positive?

How did you feel when giving birth?

PROBE: Was it a positive or negative experience?

Did being pregnant affect your transition/gender identity in any way?

How do you think [child] feels about the fact that you were pregnant with them?

IF ADOPTION:

Could you talk me through your experiences of the adoption process?

PROBE: positive or negative experiences, different stages

ALL: Did you receive any support when you were becoming a parent?

If yes, who from?

PROBE: social support, organisations used

What other support would have been helpful, if any?

Do you think it is harder for trans/non-binary people to become parents compared to cis parents or do you not think it makes a difference?

If yes, in what ways?

IF HAS MORE THAN ONE CHILD:

Can I check, what was your gender identity when you had [other child]?

If different, does it feel different parenting with a different gender identity?

How was [other child] conceived?

PROBE: why did you decide to use the same/different method of conception?

ALL: Do you plan on having any more children?

Would you use the same method again to have more children? Why/why not?

HEALTHCARE/ADOPTIVE SERVICES

Next, I have a few questions about the healthcare/adoptive services you received whilst becoming a parent.

Did you feel the healthcare you received was sensitive to your gender identity or was it insensitive?

Did healthcare/adoption agency staff use your preferred pronouns when talking to you?

If no, how did you feel about being misgendered?

Did you find the paperwork was appropriate for you as a trans person?

IF MALE/NB PREGNANCY: Did you feel the midwives/doctors were well informed about male/non-binary pregnancy specifically?

If no, what could they have done better? How could services be improved?

Did you experience any legal problems in becoming a parent?

PROBE: registering child's birth? Mother or father?

Do you think the NHS provides appropriate fertility treatment for trans people?

And more generally, do you have any recommendations for ways in which the NHS/adoptive system could improve services for trans people?

What new options/reproductive services do you think/hope will be available to trans people in the future?

PROBE: technologies?

BEING A PARENT

Now I'd like to ask you a few questions now about your experiences as a parent, and what being a trans/non-binary parent means to you.

What name do you want your child to call you (ie Mum/Dad, gender neutral titles)?

PROBE: why have you chosen that name?

IF CHILD OLD ENOUGH: Is that how they refer to you?

If no, what do they call you? How does that make you feel?

Different people have different views about gender roles and parenting…

Do you think that gender or gender identity affects the way someone parents?

PROBE: why/why not? And how about in your own family

Are there any other aspects of your identity that affect the way you parent?

Do you feel that as a trans/non-binary parent you parent in similar or different ways to cis parents?

PROBE: in what ways is it similar or different?

Are your experiences of being a trans/non-binary parent different to what you expected?

And in general then, what are the best parts of being a trans/non-binary parent?

And what are the most challenging parts?

STIGMA AND TRANSPHOBIA

These are a few questions about what you think other people think about trans/NB people.

What do you think the general public thinks about trans/NB people?

PROBE: is there a general positive or negative perception, would you say?

How are trans/NB people represented within the media?

PROBE: specifically, how are trans/NB parents represented?

How do you feel about these representations?

Do you think that being a trans/NB parent affects what other people think about your parenting abilities?

PROBE: in what way?

Have you experienced any negative reactions from others about being a trans/NB parent?

eg Family, friends, child's school/nursery, colleagues or strangers?

IF YES: How do you handle those situations?

How do you feel in those situations?

Are your own feelings about being a trans/NB parent affected by other people's thoughts about trans people within society?

And has your family been accepting of you becoming a (trans/NB) parent?

Have your friends been accepting of you becoming a (trans/NB) parent?

Do you know many other LGBT+ parents?

PROBE: specifically trans/NB parents?

Is it important for you to socialise with other trans/NB parents or is this not important?

Do you feel your neighbourhood is accepting of you being a trans/NB parent?

Are you active in trans groups and forums on the internet?

How about in person?

Would you say you are politically active with regard to trans issues?

IF NB: Do you feel as a non-binary person you experience more or less discrimination than a trans person with a binary gender?

TALKING TO CHILD ABOUT GENDER IDENTITY AND TRANSPHOBIA

These are a few questions about how you talk to [child] about being in a trans parent family.

Have you told [child] about you being trans?

If yes, when did you start discussing this? What have you told them?

PROBE: language used

If no, do you plan on telling [child] about being trans?

PROBE: If yes, When? What do you plan on telling them?

If no, do you feel it is unimportant for them to know?

Do you think that you will talk to [child] about problems they may face/possible teasing for having a trans parent? Or is that an unnecessary conversation for your family?

Has your child faced any transphobia or bullying as a result of being in a trans parent family?

Are you worried about your child facing transphobia or bullying?

If yes, does this affect how 'out' you are?

IF CHILD AGED UNDER 4:

If your child goes to nursery, does anyone at [child]'s nursery know about you being trans?

If yes, how did they respond?

IF CHILD AGED 4 + and knows/discusses trans:

In the last year, roughly how often do you think you have had conversations with your child about being raised by a parent/parent(s) who is/are trans?

Has this changed over time?

Who initiates these conversations?

What are [child]'s questions?

How do you think [child] feels about having a trans parent?

Does anyone at [child]'s school know about you being trans?

If yes, how did they respond?

How do you think that your child sees your family?

REFLECTIONS

Generally speaking is there any advice you would give to other trans/NB people wishing to become parents?

OVERALL VIEW OF THE CHILD'S FUTURE

Finally, I would like to ask you a few questions about [child]'s future. Do you have any particular hopes and ambitions for [child]?

What do you think are [child]'s best characteristics, the things most likely to help them be happy or successful?

Thank you so much, that's all of the questions that we have for you today. Is there anything about your family life or parenting experience that you'd like to tell us about that we haven't asked?

Appendix 9 - List of codes identified within interview data of TNB parents

admiration due to being male parent	left wing approach to parenting
affected by discrimination and others' opinions	LGB experience compared to T
age as barrier to parenting spaces	LGBT not inclusive of TNB
aims to inspire others/increase understanding	link between gender presentation and pregnancy
always learning about identity	loss of confidence
always wanted to be a parent	loss of sense of self
ambivalence	lost friends
anger about transphobia	lower education/class more transphobic
assumptions about young parents	lucky to be able to conceive naturally
avoidance as strategy	lying as means to an end
avoidance of uninclusive spaces	lying/non-disclosure to receive treatment
balancing different factors/needs	media representation harmful
being NB parent easier than expected	medicalisation of childbirth
benefit of co-parenting	meeting other TNB parents not important
benefit of pregnancy	misgendering
biological link	misinformation about breastfeeding
biphobia	misinformation about pregnancy
birth certificate relates to parental leave	misinformation is a problem
breastfeeding as a gendered experience	mixed acceptance
breastfeeding as exciting	mixed representations in media
can't change self	monogamy as realistic/easier
child ashamed of family	mother and baby groups as exclusionary
child chose parental name	mothers seen as important
child experiencing transphobia at school	multi-parent family not seen as family
child loves family	need for more representation
child misgendered due to clothing	negative experience in clinic/pregnancy space
children as accepting	negative reactions from others
chose a queer route to parenthood	no good parts about being a trans parent
cis parent as mediator	no representation better than bad representation
cisheteronormative assumption	no representation of TNB parents
class and precarity	non-binary/binary difference
concern about safety	non-disclosure as strategy
conflict about posting on social media	non-verbal negative reaction
conflict around dressing of child	normalcy
considered different routes to parenthood	not defined by pregnancy
contradicting narrative	not having gametes is difficult
co-parenting not accepted	not politically active
correctly gendered by healthcare staff	not used to transphobia
cross-cultural differences	parenting as gendered
dads seen as unimportant	parenting as normative
decision process about gendered name	partners left out in pregnancy
defensiveness	passing not a goal

desire for more understanding/inclusivity	people accepting in real life
desire for un-gendered parenting	people ignore NB identity
desire to protect family	people worried about saying wrong thing
detachment from body as strategy	perceived as weird
didn't think they deserved to be a parent	perseverance in the face of discrimination
difference between sex and gender	polarisation in public opinion
difference between TNB and cis families	power of clinic
different types of trans	pragmatic strategy
difficult to explain gender neutral parenting	pregnancy affected gender identity
difficult to navigate uninclusive spaces	pregnancy as gendered
difficulty of being 'the first'	pregnancy as setback
dis/advantages to unique identity intersection	pregnancy as simple
disabled parent seen as less competent	pregnancy reinforced gender identity
discrimination against disabled parents	pregnancy separate from gender
discrimination against single parents	pregnancy/birth as means to an end
discrimination based on multiple identities	prejudice linked to proximity
doesn't know how to handle discrimination	pressure to be a model minority
doesn't know other TNB parents	pride in queer identity
doesn't want child to be restricted by gender	public fascination with TNB people
doesn't want to out others	public misinformed about trans
easier for feminine people to be parents than masculine	public perception negative
educating others	public scared of TNB
erasure	queer media important
essentialist understanding of gender	queering parenting
ethnic/religious background limited expression of gender identity	reason for choosing adoption
excitement about parenthood	recommendations for improvement
expectation of cisnormativity	received good advice re gamete freezing
experience of domestic violence	representation improving
experience of homelessness	researched trans pregnancy
experience of transphobia	resisting being seen as normative
experiences of interracial adoption	resisting cisnormativity
family as different to others	resisting gender roles
family not reflected on birth certificate	restricted from maternity leave
feelings of exclusion	school as gendered experience for child
feelings of frustration	second guessing experiences of transphobia
feelings of guilt about being TNB parent	seen as normative by others
feelings of otherness	sees self as different from other TNB people
feelings of vulnerability	self-loathing
financial cost of parenthood	sensationalisation in media
financial cost of transition	simplistic portrayal of trans in media
gender as unavoidable	step-parent-unprepared for child
gender does not affect parenting	strategies for dealing with transphobia
gender dysphoria due to pregnancy	support from others
gender identity as barrier to getting support	surface level acceptance

gender-neutral language	surprised by desire to have children
gender stereotypes as limiting	tension between activist and parenting identity
gendered paperwork inappropriate	tension between different strategies
general acceptance in neighbourhood	tension between inner/outer world
genetic connection not important	TERFs as hostile
grown in confidence	TNB individuals not seen as parents
hard to find community	TNB parent as normal to child
hard to stand up for self	TNB parent family benefits
harder for TNB compared to cis parents	TNB parent more keen on gender-neutral clothing
harassment	TNB parent seen as unsafe/unsuitable
heteronormativity/homophobia	TNB parent similar to cis parent
homonormativity	TNB politics as exhausting
hope for more inclusivity	trans activism
identity change due to pregnancy	trans as political
identity management as constant	trans male parent as complicated identity
ignoring stigma	trans parenting worth it
impact of disability on parenting	trans pregnancy as difficult
importance of inclusive spaces	trans pregnancy worth it
importance of knowing similar families	trans stories made for cis people
importance of queer space	transition affected desire to have children
importance of role models	transition as journey
importance of social support	transmisogyny
inappropriate questions	transnormativity
individual changing institution	transphobia as other person problem
individual support vs institutional transphobia	transphobia decreasing over time
institutionalised transphobia	transphobia in adoption system
institutional support	transphobia recently increased
interesting	transpositivity
internalised transphobia	uncomfortable with child using gendered name
interracial family	underestimated TNB pregnancy
intersectional understanding of identity	uninclusive spaces as unpredictable
involved in school to prevent bullying	unsure about how to talk to child
isolation	upset about not being able to carry a child
lack of acceptance in local neighbourhood	used to lack of representation
lack of appropriate fertility treatment	used to transphobia
lack of information/resources	uses humour to navigate difficult situations
lack of institutional support	very difficult to be a trans parent
lack of media representation	wanted to be involved in pregnancy
lack of solidarity from queer circles	wants to prove others wrong
lack of space for non-binary	well-meaning but misguided support
lack of support for disabled parents	worried about being visible
lack of support from others	worry about child facing discrimination
lack of TNB parenting space	worry about child not being supportive
lack of TNB POC	worry about future
lack of understanding about family diversity	worry about others' thoughts

lack of understanding about non-binary identities	would feel guilty if child bullied
lack of understanding of polyamory	